

SALVATION

EVERY MAN'S

Great Concern.

CONTAINING,

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| I. The deplorable Ignorance, and general Blindness of Mankind, in this most important Affair. | VI. Mistakes and false Measures in the Way of Salvation. |
| II. The Cause of this so general Blindness, and Ignorance in the Business of Salvation: and what may best prevent and cure it. | VII. Errors to be avoided in correcting our Errors. |
| III. Wherein the mighty Importance of this Affair consists. | VIII. That Men ought to work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling. |
| IV. The principal Obstructions to this great Work. | IX. The Encouragements to this Work, and Easiness of succeeding in it. |
| V. The Means of Salvation, and the Use we ought to make of them. | X. That in order to our own Salvation, we ought to contribute to the Salvation of others. |
| | XI. The Conclusion. |

Written originally in FRENCH,

By Monsieur *RAPIN*.

Translated into ENGLISH,

By *GEORGE STANHOPE* D.D.

Late DEAN of *Canterbury*, and CHAPLAIN
in Ordinary to HIS MAJESTY.

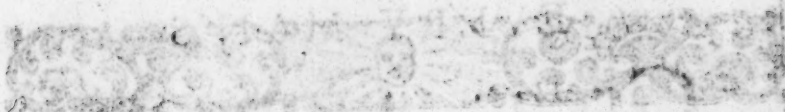
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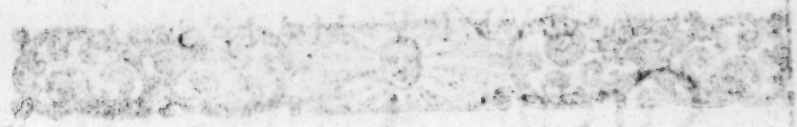
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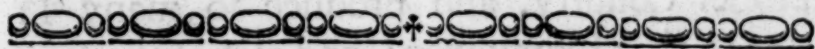
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SALVATION

Every Man's Great Concern.



CHAP. I.

The deplorable Ignorance, and general Blindness of Mankind, in this most important Affair.



THE Lives of most Christians are so very disagreeable to their Profession, that a considering Man cannot, without some degree of Concern, observe their vehement Application to other Affairs, and their wretched Indifference in the Matter of Salva-

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tion. For is it not really, a most lamentable Mismanagement, an Absurdity rather, in a Man who pretends to walk *not by Sight*, but *by Faith*, to be fond of the present perishing Object, and to express no manner of regard for that happy Futurity, which must never have an end? To dote upon the fleeting Trifles of this Life, and not suffer the lasting and substantial Advantages of the next to make any manner of Impression upon his Heart? to rely upon the flattering Promises of the World, which are no better than Treachery and Deceit, and distrust the Power of the Almighty, and the unalterable Word of him, who is Truth it self? In a word, to lay claim to Heaven as his own proper Country, and produce so many Titles to that Inheritance; and yet at the same time to be so closely wedded to the World, which is no better than the Place of his Pilgrimage and Exile?

What strange Spirit of Error hath gotten possession of us, that we should behave our selves so very unlike Christians? And how are our Hearts bewitched, that Vanity and Folly should attract them so strongly, while all the noble Idea's of another Life, which Religion presents to us, are not able to move our Affections one whit? Certain it is, no Business can be of equal consequence, and yet as certain too, that not any is so little regarded, as that of Salvation.

vation. For what Efforts do any of us make to attain a Kingdom, which is designed only for a Reward to that vehement Zeal, *which even takes it by force*? Where is the Man, that employs his Thoughts upon the Methods necessary for this purpose: much less, that chearfully abandons all his other Interests, to lay himself out upon this alone? And how prodigious in the meanwhile is our Stupidity, which confines our Expectations and Designs within the narrow Limits of Time, when Faith hath filled our Souls with glorious Hopes, and given them a boundless Eternity to range in?

This Blindness and Insensibility, no doubt, is generally the Cause of the disorderly and debauched Lives, which the present Age so justly complains of; and of that fatal Coldness in others of less scandalous Character; which it is the Design of this little Tract to remove, by representing to Christians, how very highly it concerns them, to be very serious and careful in the Business of their Salvation. And may that God, who first inspired me with this good Design, add to my Words that Weight and Efficacy peculiar to his own; that they may rouse the Indifferent and Unthinking into Consideration; and, like a Clap of Thunder, awaken the World out of their deep dead Sleep of Ignorance and Irreligion; and strike the Terror of his Judgments through

every Corner of their Souls. Give force, O Lord, and life to my Discourse, that I may proclaim to all the World afresh, those great and precious Promises, already published in the Gospel: And enable me, I beseech thee, to tear away this thick Veil from before Mens Eyes, and to scatter that Darkness, which clouds and confounds their Understanding; that so, seeing our own true Interest, and following after Righteousness and true Holiness, we may obtain that Crown which thou hast promised to as many as love and obey thee.

The only Expedient necessary for making a Christian sensible, how egregiously stupid and foolish Men are in this great Concern of Salvation, is to shew the Man to himself; and give him a true Representation of his Misery, his Weakness, his wretched Circumstances; and so to awaken him out of his profound Sleep by this lamentable Prospect. He comes into this World, in the quality of a banished Man, into the Place of Exile to which he is condemned. His Life is a Journey through a strange Land; and his Death the thing, which determines his Banishment, and calls him home again. *I am a Stranger with thee, and a Sojourner as all my Fathers were,* says the Psalmist, (*Psal. xxxix. 12.*) But who is there among all these Travellers, that seriously considers what Place he is going to?

Every

every one goes his own way, where Fortune or Humour leads : His Mind runs upon nothing but Interest, or Honour, or Preferment : Men pursue their Business, and their Projects, without reflecting, where all this will end at last. They give themselves up to the Ramblings of their own Mind, and wander after their own Inclinations; and the Extremity of their Madness and Misery consists in this, that they are not sensible what Way they are in, nor what Place it leads to. They are content to be ignorant in nothing, but the Concern of their Souls. Every Object they meet with in their Passage entertains them, but the End of their Journey never takes up their Thoughts at all. They are extremely curious about the Accidents and Events of this Life ; but not at all solicitous what will become of them in a future and eternal State. And is not this every whit as extravagant, as it would be in a Pilot, to take great pains for the informing himself in the several Seas he is to pass, and not venture on board till he have made himself Master of all the Roads, where the Rocks and Sands lie, and how to keep clear of them ; but at the same time never to trouble himself with learning what Port he is to make, or whither the Vessel is bound ? So is Mankind, each of them that ridiculous Traveller, that studies the Roads

very carefully, and enquires out the good Inns, and how he may be best accommodated, but never thinks whither he is going, and what ought to be the Place of his Rest.

Nay, which is worse, such are not only the generality of * Men, but the generality of Christians too. They govern themselves by false Rules of worldly and corrupt Wisdom, set their Hearts upon the present, and have no regard, no sense, of that which is to come. Men are inquisitive how the World goes; desirous to hear, grave in reflecting, serious in arguing and spending their Judgment upon every thing; but not the least curious to hearken after any News concerning that everlasting Kingdom, which our Religion proposes to us; or who governs and disposes Matters there; or what Course is best to take for getting thither. Ah! *Christian Brethren*, if that Name belong to us, if we have any Sparks of Faith still alive in us, let us (as † *St. Chrysostom* advises) lift up our Eyes toward this holy City; which is intended for our everlasting Habitation. Let us first acquaint our selves with the King that reigns there, and adore his Divine Majesty with Reverence and holy Fear. Let us sit down in Silence and profound Meditation, and observe all the great and marvellous Excellencies

* Homo ad immortalium cognitionem nimis mortalıs.
Senec.

† Hom. in S. Matt.

of our beloved Country. Let us get the best Instruction we are able in the Way thither, and observe the By-paths that would lead us wrong; the Turnings and Windings; the Dangers and Difficulties, through which we must pass to so holy and blessed a Dwelling. Let us consider the Honour and Reward of all those, who are thought worthy to be admitted thither: What sort of Life they lead when they are there; what profound Peace they enjoy; what Pleasures they are entertained with; what their Employment, and their Conversation. Such Reflections as these are absolutely necessary, if we do in good earnest desire to be saved. For * St. Austin hath observed very truly, that *he who knows not whither he goes, cannot possibly make any progress in his Travels.* To go one knows not whither, is the Property of Brutes; and in them it is excusable, because Nature hath qualified them for no better: But in a Man to set out without knowing where he is to take up, is a most insufferable Folly, and the last of all Reproaches. And yet, as absurd a Proceeding as this is, whom almost can we find, that behaves himself otherwise? What a world of Heat, and

* Non bene curritur, cum quo currendum est nesciatur. *Lib. de pers. Just.*

Peregrinantibus in hac præsentis vitæ vastissima solitudine oportet nos non ignorare quod tendimus, nam ambulare quotidie non præmeditato itineris sine imprudentissimum est. *Lib. de Humil. c. 14.*

Eagerness, and Bustle, what Industry and Contrivance do we see upon all other Occasions? What Neglect and Indifference, what Coldness and Contempt in this great Concern of Salvation? No Care is thought too much, no Application sedulous enough to secure our temporal Advantages; but our everlasting Interest we have no manner of regard for. We are like silly Children, taken up with Toys and Trifles. Our Minds so bewitch'd, so prepossess'd with the Love of sensible Objects, that we have no Relish left for those that are spiritual and heavenly. We turn in a manner perfect Infidels; all that our Preachers tell us of another Life passes for Dream and Fable; the Hope of a blissful Eternity, which Religion hath made so many Promises, and left us so strong Assurances of, makes no Impression upon our Hearts; because indeed the Powers of Faith are weakened, and our Understandings refuse to be governed any longer by this Principle. That incorruptible Treasure, so magnified in Scripture, affects us much less than the perishing unstable Riches of the present Life. We decline enquiring into the Value of this Pearl of great Price, because we have no inclination to sell all we have, and give in exchange for it, *Matt. xiii.* which yet our Saviour advised as the greatest Wisdom, and most profitable Merchandize. To speak to Men
now

now upon the great Importance of looking after their Souls, is in effect to talk to People in a Lethargy. The impure Desires of earthly Enjoyments have quite intoxicated their Minds, and they are grown perfectly insensible of Heaven and Heavenly Things. But this inward Stupidity, which is indeed one of the most fatal Diseases brought upon the Soul by Sin, proceeds originally from want of Consideration; and from that Ignorance and Disregard of a future State, which Men are now so far from being ashamed of as they ought, that they even affect and put it on. This was St. *Augustin's* Condition, when, as himself confesses *, “ he “ walked in the Follies of his Youth, in the “ dark gloomy Night of his Passions, and “ banish'd Heaven from his Thoughts. “ And † thus wandring from God by the Irregularity of his Life, and losing himself “ in the Mazes of Sin and Error, he became “ a barren and unprofitable Soil, and fell “ into the extremity of Misery.”

When a Man is blind, and all the while fancies he sees, the Mischief is incurable. For what Course can be taken with him who hath no Sense of his Distemper? In such Cases, Men are in danger and yet fear nothing; they go wrong and imagine themselves in the right: And all this Spiritual

* Lib. Confess. 1. Cap. 18. † Lib. Confess. 2. Cap. 10.

Blindness is by the Prophet *Zephaniah* declared to be the Punishment of Mens Sins, (*Zeph. i. 17.*) A Man sets sail in foul Weather, and knows nothing of the Storm; he walks in the Night, and is not sensible it is dark; he exposes his Person to Danger, without the least Provision or Defence against it; and never reflects so much as upon his own Ignorance and want of Reflection. He knows nothing of his own Condition; sees no further than his Senses can carry him, and therefore cannot discover the Infirmitie of his Soul; nor that Darkness, which clouds and misleads his Affections, more than it impairs his Speculation and Understanding. In this wretched Confusion he blunders thorough, like Men benighted in a thick Wood, who cannot distinguish any of the Objects that present themselves. The Leaves affright them terribly, but the Pits and Precipices give them no apprehension at all. They are bold, where they should be fearful, and Cowards where they ought to shew Courage. Thus is it with the Christian, who is once confounded and beaten off from the Care of what must be hereafter. He knows not what he does, nor whither he is moving; he takes the wrong Way for the right; forsakes the Truth, and follows after Lyes; and his Heart grows so hard, so impenetrable to all Religious Impressions, that the

the Terror of God's Judgments, the Fear of the last great Account, the Dread of that irreversible Sentence, which the Gospel hath recorded in Terms so full of Horror; those piercing Eyes that search the darkest Corners of the Heart; that Light from which nothing is hid; that inflexible Justice of a Judge upon whom no disguise can pass; and all those awakening, or rather astonishing Considerations, which the Christian Faith represents to us, are utterly lost, and can have no effect upon him. He is deaf to the Calls of his own Conscience, which frequently admonishes, and reminds him of his latter End, by occasions given from without. For every Creature, and what happens to each of them, are so many Mouths opened to warn Man, that he, like them, must die, and quickly change. The mighty Revolutions in great Fortunes and Families; the surprising Disgraces of Persons in the highest Posts; the deplorable End we frequently see made by obstinate and profligate Wretches; the sudden sweeping away of Sinners, by which God speaks to us, as by so many Instruments of his Wrath and Indignation, to fright us into better Manners, and call us back to our Duty, when the softer Voice of his Love and Kindness hath been neglected and despised; these are so many Warnings; and yet we turn the deaf Ear
even

even to these. And what hope then is there left, that his Word and Ministers should have any efficacy upon such People? Nay, we are so unhappy as to abuse those very Assistances he affords us, on purpose to prevent our Ruin. In a word, we cannot endure Ignorance, and esteem it a Reproach in any sort of Business, but this necessary one; we affect to know every thing but the Darkness of our own Minds, and that we will not be made sensible of, because we love and are loth to mend it.

✧ This indeed is the third Degree of Mens Folly in the general Ignorance and Disregard of their Salvation, and the Methods proper for obtaining it. And no question, this is an Aggravation much more deplorable than both the former. For if it be an Unhappiness to be Blind, to be fond of that Blindness is the very extremity of Unhappiness. Now the Sinner is pleased with this wretched Condition, because it conceals his Misery from him: Darkness is therefore loved, because his Deeds are Evil; and Light hated, because it would make very unwelcome Discoveries, by shewing him the Error of his ways. He declines acquainting himself with the Judgments of God, because this Contemplation would urge him to amendment of Life, and oblige him to break off the wicked Course of his sensual Delights. And therefore
Thoughts

Thoughts upon so serious a Subject are not for his purpose. He concerns not himself, how Matters go in another State, for fear these Enquiries should rob him of the false Sweets of this. Such Ignorance is cherished and chosen for the sake of that thick Veil it puts before Mens Eyes, which keeps the ghastly Objects of Death and Eternity out of sight. By the help of this it is, that the Sinner stifles all the good Motions and sound Reasonings, which Faith and Religion are apt to excite in his Heart; by this he gets loose from that troublesome Caution, which is the natural Result of a strict impartial Account to be rendred to God for the whole Conduct of our Lives; and thus he sets himself free from all fear of present Ills, and all the Uncertainty of what will become of him hereafter: Thus thinking of nothing but living here, without mingling any Thoughts of Death with his Reflections, he acts in full agreement with his Principle; forms to himself a false Happiness, resulting from the Enjoyment of worldly Advantages; the better to erase all the Idea's of true Happiness in another World. And thus he falls, by degrees, from one Error to another, tumbles from Precipice to Precipice; and becomes daily more incurably blind and senseless. His Sleep is so deep, so stupid, that nothing can awaken him. For as every thing hath a Mouth

and Arguments for Goodness, to a believing and well-disposed Christian ; so, to the obstinate and unbelieving, every thing is dumb, and the loudest Cails are lost upon such Wretches.

But the extravagant Folly and Madness of this Condition will yet more clearly appear, if we suffer our selves to reflect a little upon the pains Christians are at to destroy themselves, in despite of all that Jesus Christ hath done to save them. *Blessed God!* After our Chains are burst, and all the Fetters of our Captivity broken to pieces ; when the Lamb is slain, and Sin destroyed by the Sacrifice of him ; when the Hand-writing of Death against us is cancelled and nailed to the Cross, and Reconciliation between God and Man so solemnly ratified in the presence of all the World ; when we are translated into the Condition of God's Children, and have his Kingdom settled for our Inheritance ; shall all this be thrown away upon us ? And do we ruin our selves as effectually, as if no part of it had ever been done in our behalf ? Baptism, which gives all the glorious Hopes that can belong to Persons adopted by God, by stripping us of our old Man, and renewing us in the Spirit of the inner Man ; the Death of our Mediator, the unspeakable Riches of his Mercy ; the Sacraments, those Pledges of his Love and our Comfort ;

fort; all signify nothing to our advantage, by reason of our dreadful Abuse of these sacred Things. And what prodigious Blindness is this, to stifle so great Grace, and stand it out against so strong a Light ! For Christians are the only Persons, to whom this Kingdom of Heaven hath been promised or declared. The Law of Grace, that pure, that holy Law, unknown to the rest of the World, it is our Privilege to have revealed, and its Mysteries discovered to us; to us the powerful Motives of eternal Rewards and Punishments have been proposed; we are that *chosen Seed*, that *holy Nation*, that *peculiar People*, mentioned by St. *Peter*, 1 Pet. ii. The *Children of Promise*, as *Isaac* was, Gal. iv. nay, much more than that very *Isaac*, who yet is said to *have been born after the Spirit*. <

The Circumstances of the Age we live in, are yet a farther Aggravation of this Wickedness and Folly. Religion is now in a flourishing Condition; the Church in outward Peace and Prosperity; our Princes make profession of the same Faith: the Name of Christian is a Title had in great and general Esteem; and the Persons who call themselves by it are in the highest Posts of Honour and Power; and yet we suffer ourselves to be worsted in the midst of these Advantages, by that very Enemy, whom the Primitive Christians vanquished, in despite
spight

spight of outward Conflicts and bitter Persecutions. They rendred their Faith triumphant in Prisons, and Tortures and Deaths; we tamely submit and yield the Prize, when nothing of all this threatens us. Our Advantages do us no service, because in the midst of such mighty Encouragements, such holy Laws, such sovereign Remedies, we part with our Crown, and plainly give it up, by a Conversation suitable to the Character of such only, as, whatever they may pretend, yet in reality, believe not one word of all the wondrous Things done by Christ for the Salvation of Mankind. We look upon the Life to come, as a hazardous and uncertain Thing, and the Manner of our serving God plainly confesses, that we entertain no great Expectations of getting any thing by him.

Is all this Blindness owing to our Pride? Or does the Corruption of our Manners harden and stupify us? Or where is it, that we have drank this Cup of Slumbring, which hath utterly defaced all remembrance of Heaven being our Heritage? What a Reproach is it to us, that instead of cherishing and supporting our Minds with Hopes of another Life, we trifle away our Time and Thoughts in the vain Desires of the present? Hence it is, that the Indifference of Christians is made use of for an Argument to justify the Libertinism of Infidels. And in good truth, when wicked and worldly Men
ob-

observe such, entirely taken up in building stately Houses, purchasing great Estates, looking out for Settlements, and the like, how is it to be expected, that they should believe what we tell them of our Faith and Religion? They will be apt to infer our true Persuasion from the general Strain of our Actions and Designs, much rather than from our Words and bare Professions. They will very hardly be persuaded, that Men who live and project at this rate, look upon themselves to be Strangers only and Pilgrims upon Earth. Certainly, were this our Opinion in good earnest, we should not be so mighty fond of staying here; but well content to take some pains about Heaven, if our Hearts and Hopes were really there. Thus they are confirmed in their Unbelief and Irreligion, by that immoderate Zeal for the present perishing Advantages of this World, which they observe, in Men of a Principle, which teaches them to despise these, and seek things to come. The first Christians were guilty of no such Inconsistencies. When they once pretended to govern themselves by this Principle, they did not only *take the spoiling of their Goods patiently*, but even abandoned them of their own accord; sold their Estates, and laid them at the Apostles feet; distributed to their Brethren, and reserved to themselves no Property in any Possessions here below; for the mighty Influence,

and glorious Idea's of a Treasure eternal, and that more enduring Substance, which the Gospel had promised them in the Heavens.

Lastly, The Extravagance of this Neglect appears yet more unaccountable, if to the wretched Consequences attending it, (which I shall not here insist upon particularly) we add that other Consideration, that it is so perfectly unprofitable to the Persons indulging it. For can it be imagined, that the sensual Man, in throwing off these Obligations of providing for the Soul, makes the wiser choice for his own Safety and Advantage, when he labours to ease himself of the Cares, which so important a Concern ought in all reason to give him? Is that Peace, which the World promises, more certain to be attained, or more solid and stable in the Fruition, than that which God intends for? Are the Laws of Passion more gentle and easy to be submitted to, than those of Reason and Equity? Does a Man speed better by that Confidence he reposes in the vain Hopes of earthly Advantages, and all the subtle Projects of fleshly Wisdom? Is this a surer Defence against Accidents, or can we by it secure to our selves the Events of what we undertake? Will this keep a Man's Mind more quiet, and set him at rest with regard to those things, whose Consequences are of eternal Concern? Will Death by this means spare him

him one Moment longer, or that Term of Years appointed for the Sinner, slacken their Pace one whit? No, no; the most exquisite Human Prudence cannot prolong our Lives one Minute, beyond the Period fix'd above. Death is the unavoidable Determination of all earthly Power and Greatness. This empty Figure of a World, which now dazles our Eyes with its Splendour, shall shortly disappear like a Vapour. All the Pride of human Wisdom must vanish as a Track of Smoak, be reduced to a Handful of Ashes, and a confused Heap of Dust and Rubbish. And then the Worldling, who hath drudged on a Number of Years under the Yoke of his Passions, and been a Slave to his Appetite and inordinate Affections, will find nothing in himself but a vast Vacuity, and extreme Indigence of all substantial Comforts.

Where will then the Advantage be of his listening so readily to the Flatteries of the World, and continuing so obstinately deaf to the Promises of God? Then shall the Proud and Vain take up the wise Man's Lamentation, (*Wisd. v. 8, 9.*) *What hath Pride profited us? or what good have Riches with our Vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a Shadow; they are gone by in an instant, and no sign of them is to be found.* It will then be to no manner of purpose to take into their mouths that insolent Boast, mentioned by *Isaiah*,

(Ch. xxviii. 15.) *We have made a Covenant with Death, and with Hell are we at Agreement; when the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made Lyes our Refuge, and under Falshood have we hid our selves.* For do but observe what follows, (Verse 18.) *Thus saith the Lord, your Covenant with Death shall be disannulled, and your Agreement with Hell shall not stand. When the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.* In very deed, the utmost Power of Man is much too feeble to secure us against the Indignation of a provoked God; a God, from whom nothing can be hid; a God, whom no Strength can withstand. The Sinner, which placed his Trust in Greatness, is brought down; the Protection he depended upon, is confounded and lost; this haughty Dust and Ashes, is blown away with the blast of the Almighty's Displeasure. *The Extortioner is at an end, the Spoiler ceaseth, the Oppressors are consumed,* and that insolent Worm which to-day lifts up his Head, shall to-morrow be trodden under foot, and crush'd to pieces. This is the Fate of all them, who labour to evade the Severity of the Divine Justice, by banishing from their Thoughts, and wiping out of their Hearts, all those wholesome and religious Impressions, which
Faith

Faith had left engraved there, to put them in mind of their Salvation.

Let not us then, who do not only call ourselves, but I hope really are, Christians, follow these Errors so common among wretched Men: Let us not lend any Ear to that false Wisdom of the World, which would draw us off from the Sense and Consideration of our Duty; nor be so cruel to our selves, as in Compliment and indiscreet Fondness for our Bodies, to ruin our Souls. Let us assure our selves, that the greatest and most fatal of all Follies, is that of neglecting that most important Affair, our Eternal Salvation; and learn to consult that, without which all our other Learning is in truth no better than Ignorance: Let us draw away this Veil from before our Eyes, which intercepts our Prospect of Heaven, and break in sunder the Bands, which fasten us down to the Earth: Let us with fear and trembling look forward upon the Consequences of this momentous Affair; considering with awful Fear, the Designs of God toward us with regard to our Everlasting State; and examining with Trembling, the great Book that lies before us; lest we should omit any part of that, which his Wisdom hath made necessary to be done, in order to our Salvation. And, the better to quicken us in our present Unconcernedness; and set us free from those fatal Inchantments, which dispose us to value

the Creature more than the Creator ; and to lay out our Love and Pains upon a frail and short Life, rather than one which can never decay, never have an end ; let us try to find out the bitter Spring, and true Original of this dangerous Ignorance ; that so, by discovering the Root of our Disease, we may be the better able to apply proper Remedies. And the making this Discovery I design shall be the Business of my Second Chapter.



C H A P. II.

The Cause of this so general Blindness and Ignorance in the Business of Salvation : and what may best Prevent and Cure it.

MA N, since his Fall, is so wretchedly ignorant and feeble, that he is extremely in the dark concerning his own true Advantage. And, as he hath but little Knowledge left to understand, so hath he yet less Inclination to pursue it. For the Byass to Corruption, which is now become natural, draws so strongly downward, that he finds himself but very coldly affected with hopes of Heaven. All the Judgments he forms to himself are false, because the

Maxims

Maxims of the Flesh, which are the only Measures he goes by, are manifestly so. He mistakes Good for Evil, and Evil for Good; Poison for Physick, and Physick for Poison; and his whole Conduct is one continued Error. His Notions and Designs are all worldly, and this is the Cause that none but sensible Objects affect him. He thinks nothing real and certain but what is present, all to come after Death passes for an imaginary Dream; and he cannot apprehend any thing in all those Revelations which Faith hath made of a distant and eternal State. This is that carnal Man spoken of by the Apostle, (1 Cor. ii.) who cannot *understand the things of God, because they are foolishness unto him*. His Mind is so debauched by his present Blindness, that he thinks all those, who differ from him in Opinion, no better than Fools and Madmen. The Wisdom which makes Salvation its great and only Care, passes for Bigotry of weak Minds; poor Wretches, who know no better, than to abandon all other Concerns of this one. His Heart confines itself within the Condition of Mortality, and hath no regard at all to any thing beyond it. And all that Power of the New Man, which was put on in Baptism, is of little or no efficacy, for the possessing him with a just Apprehension of the really Good and Evil Things of this and another Life.

Thus he goes wrong, because he knows not what Way he ought to go. He deviates into Evil, through Ignorance of what is truly Good : he continues ignorant of heavenly Things, because he attends to none but earthly ; and hath no regard for Salvation, because he hath no Idea of the great Importance this is of to him. His Understanding is full of Falshood and Mistake, because his Inclinations are wholly upon the World. And they, who, according to the Apostle, *mind earthly things*, cannot possibly have their *Thoughts and Conversation in Heaven*. This seems to be the first Cause of Mens Ignorance and Neglect, in the great Concern of Salvation.

II. The Second proceeds from want of Faith, by which Men have but very weak and faint Persuasions of another Life, and from thence a Disesteem of the Recompence God hath prepared for them that love and serve him diligently. The Mind of Man is too gross, clearly to conceive the Value of that hidden Treasure mentioned and recommended to us in the Gospel. Those glorious Hopes of an everlasting Kingdom, make but slight Impressions upon the Heart of most Christians, because they cannot frame a full and adequate Idea of them. They are apt to question, whether there be any such thing, because they cannot enter into the whole Mystery of it. And the Designs of God for the
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the Glory and Benefit of his Elect are so profound, the Greatness of his Promises so unspeakable, the Wisdom of his Judgments so incomprehensible, that to sensual and carnal Minds, the very Excellence of these Things proves an hindrance and disadvantage. Hence, (as the wise Man observed in another Case, *Wisd. xvii. 1.*) *unnurtured Souls have erred*, and despised those Hopes, which they know not how to give themselves a clear and distinct account of. Faith is unactive and asleep, or rather extinct, in their Hearts; the little glimmerings of it that remain, are too faint and feeble, to guide Men in a Life, which in comparison is no better than the Shadow of Death. To this Weakness of Faith, the Insensibility of Mankind in their great Affair is very much owing; because the very Greatness and Consequence of that Affair is what they have no just Notion of. Hence they give away Pleasures that last for ever, for those which perish in the using, and die in a moment; they exchange their Title to a heavenly Inheritance, for some contemptible Advantage upon Earth; they fall into the same Extravagance with that foolish Elder Brother, who, not considering the Privileges of his Birthright, *sold it for a Mess of Pottage*, (Gen. xxv.) and lose the Prerogative of that Divine Birth, and Adoption conferred upon them in Baptism. *If thou knewest the Gift of God,*
says

says the Saviour of the World, to the Woman of *Samaria*, (John iv.) and the Value of that Water, which is a living Well springing up unto Life eternal, thou would'st no longer thirst after the foul and common Water of this World. The first Step of Christian Prudence is to give Men a disrelish of all temporal and corruptible Advantages. This shews them the Uncertainty, the Emptiness, and Unprofitableness of those Things, which use to possess our Affections; and undeceives them, by experimental Proofs how false and flattering these Expectations are. This shews us, that what Men reap hereafter will be the same in kind and proportion, with what they sow here: And that as *he who soweth to his Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption*, so none but they who *now sow to the Spirit*, shall then of *the Spirit reap Life Everlasting*, (Gal. vi. 8.)

Another Effect of this Christian Prudence, is the Teaching a Believer to walk *while he hath Light*; to quicken him in his Business; urging and spurring him forward to do the utmost he is capable of; because the Day of God draws on apace; and the *Night* will shortly overtake us in *which no Man can work*. And where Eternity depends upon a few Moments, there is no Time to spare, not one of those Moments can with safety be lost. Such a one therefore does not put off his Repentance to a Death-bed; he knows that

that the best and most pious Men find it exceeding difficult to keep their Mind intent upon God, when it is oppress'd with the heavy Burden, either of Age and its Infirmities, or of any violent Sickness and Affliction. But the Man who is weak in Faith, continues insensible of these things, and makes no such useful Reflections. He forgets and disregards while he is in Health; and, when he is sick, he finds himself unable to pursue them, though he would never so fain. And thus Men oftengo out of the World without any true Sense of another Life: Because Faith is the only Principle, which can inspire them with such a Sense; and this is darkned and in a manner quite quenched within the carnal Heart. What wonder then if they go astray, who neither think, nor know, whither they are going? For *if the Light that is in thee be Darkness; how great is that Darkness?* says our blessed Saviour, (*Matt. vi. 23.*)

III. A Third Cause of this Blindness is Presumption. For, besides the natural Effect of Pride to darken the Mind, God does, by way of just Punishment, take pleasure in discovering his Secrets to the weak and humble; and in hiding them from the proud and wise in their own Conceits; thus making his judicial Darkness a Judgment for their Haughtiness of Soul. He lets the one sort into those Mysteries, which are kept sealed and
lock'd

lock'd up from the other. He takes from the Vain that just Value for Eternity, which he gives to the Mean and Poor in Spirit ; and is content to be found of them only, who seek him with a pure and lowly Heart. It is to very little purpose, that we tell a proud Man of those glorious Rewards proposed in the Gospel. He sees not with an Eye of Faith, because Pride hath blinded his sight. The Humble only is thoroughly touched with that Awe of the terrible Judgment of God, which perhaps may stun and amaze the Proud, but makes no profitable Impression upon him. And the Blindness, which such a one hath voluntarily brought upon himself, being thus doubled by the pleasure God takes in abandoning such Persons, he falls the deeper by all his Attempts to exalt himself higher. And the End of him at last is that of the rebellious Angel, that Father of Pride, who, when he boasted, that *he would set his Throne above the Stars of God*, was even *then brought down to Hell*, and thrust into the bottomless Pit, (*Isai. xiv. 13, 15.*)

IV. A Fourth Cause of this spiritual Blindness, is a Corruption of Heart, proceeding from too great a Fondness for the World. For the World bewitches Mens Minds with specious Outsides and fair Promises, and dazles them with a Counterfeit Shine of its glaring Vanities. And when a Man is once intoxicated with this Charm, the Understanding
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is darkned, the Affections are perverted, Truth and Substance are foregone for Shadows; the trifling Concerns of the World employ all his Time and Pains; he lives, as if he were never to die, and falls into an absolute Forgetfulness of God. For (as the Apostle very truly observes) the *Friendship of this World is Enmity against God*, (James iv. 4.) And thus Life runs off in extreme Neglect, and horrible Contempt of Heaven and Salvation. The first and tenderer Years are full of Levity and Folly, Extravagance and Passion. The next Stage is exposed to Anxiety and Discontent; and the Intervals, which Pleasure and Diversion give to these, fly over his Head swiftly and without any Thought. Then comes old Age, which, like Ice, chills and freezes up all the Vigour and Sprightliness of our Faculties; and after being teased and tired out with Cares, which are good for nothing, but to distract and cut one's Heart to the quick, we waste away at last in fruitless Desires of Peace and Quiet; and feed our selves with fond Imaginations of a Happiness never to be attained. I mention not at present the Insignificance of all that Bustle and Business Men engage in, *whose weightiest Affairs are in truth but mere Trifles*; though this be a sore Aggravation of their Misery; that in such fruitless Cares as these, Men squander away that precious Time, given them by
God

God for nobler Purposes; and lengthened out, that they may make their heavenly Inheritance more sure. Nor will I here enlarge upon the Vanity and Delicacy, of the Female Sex especially; who seem so totally devoted to that one Care of rendring themselves agreeable to the World, that we can scarce discover what Portion of their Time is left for working out their Salvation. The unreasonable Partiality, they express for their Bodies, does but too loudly speak their Cruelty and want of Concern for their Souls. Nothing indeed draws off a Man's Mind more from attending to the Business of Salvation, than the immoderate Affection for the World, which loads him with all the Incumbrances of Life, and makes him sink under the Burden. And, under such Oppression, it is not easy to conceive, how a Mind should enjoy that Freedom which is necessary, to pursue heavenly Things. An Instance whereof we see in the People of *Israel*, who could not hearken to *Moses*, nor at all comfort themselves with a Prospect of the Land he promised them from God, by reason of that exceeding hard Toil, and Dejection of Spirit to which their *Egyptian* Bondage had reduced them. How deaf, alas! are Christians in like manner to all the Promises of another Life, when groaning under extremity of Want, or some other very sensible and grievous Affliction? For the Soul

Soul of Man being in some degree enslaved to his Body, and tenderly touched with all its Wants ; when under a Load of Hardship + from without, it turns readily to sensible Objects, as Remedies near at hand, but is not at leisure to raise itself up to the Contemplation of such as are remote and eternal. In short, by this wretched Inclination to the World, Men insensibly disuse themselves from so much as thinking of their true, their heavenly Country, where the Hopes and Desires of true Believers are fixed. Our Minds by this means are as it were inverted quite ; and that, which in its original Constitution was designed to be ever looking up towards Heaven, is thus bowed down to Earth. For nothing disposes Man to forget God so effectually, as Fondness for the World ; and nothing makes him cleave so close to the World, as not knowing the Nature of Things here below ; and not remembering what those are, which we are commanded to expect hereafter. So that in truth a Man throughly possess'd with the Spirit of this World will soon be involved in the very Blackness of Darknes ; Darknes so gross, that not one Ray of heavenly Light will be able to preserve it self alive, for the healing his Blindness, and recovering him to a Sense of his Duty again.

V. The Fifth Cause is a certain Cowar- +
dice and Tameness of Soul, which is apt to recoil upon the least Difficulties. Instead
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of a Mind firm and resolv'd enough to forego the Present, and keep our Eyes and Hopes upon the Future only : Instead of that Gallantry, which should raise us above the things that are seen, and aspire to those excellent Advantages only, which are distant and unseen ; which should shut our Eyes against all Considerations of worldly Interest ; adore and depend upon a God, who dwells in Light, inaccessible, otherwise than through the dark Glass of Faith ; which should serve a Master diligently, from whom we expect our Wages in another Life only ; should continue deaf and insensible to all those secret Satisfaction, by which the Pleasure we feel in the Practice of Virtue is apt to exalt us ; and not to court the Praise and good Opinion of Men, though we do nothing but what deserves to be commended : Instead, I say, of all this Christian Gallantry, which should support and animate us in the constant Profession and vigorous Practice of a Religion so pure and holy as ours ; and in every Action of our Lives demonstrate that new Spirit which Baptism endued us with ; we suffer our selves to be discouraged in doing well by every idle Imagination ; form to our selves unnecessary Terrors ; and every Real Obstruction we magnify, and run away from.

+ This continual War, which a Man is engaged in with himself, terrifies the stoutest of us all ; and the narrow humble Way of the Gospel

Gospel seems too rough and hard for the Christian to submit to, who reposes his Confidence in his own Virtue. We degenerate by degrees into that wretched misgiving Temper, of the old *Israelites*, who suffered their Hearts to fail, upon the distant disagreeing Reports of the Dangers and Difficulties, which were said to await their Passage into the Land of Promise. Thus the feeble-minded Christian gives way to false Impressions, and sinks under the formidable Idea's of Virtue and Salvation; trembles at the Sword, which divides between the Flesh and Spirit; esteems the watchful Guard over himself and all his Actions an impracticable Duty; and resolves the glorious Things spoken of another Life, into Flights and Hyperbole. But in the midst of all this Littleness of Soul, he labours for false Reasons, invents pitiful Excuses, and would put upon us with wretched Pretences, to conceal the Degeneracy of Spirit. And thus he falls by degrees from being discouraged into Distrust; from thence into Despair; from despairing to obtain, into a total disregard and forgetfulness of Salvation; of which he entertains no farther Notions, than such as represent it, as a thing, either Romantick in it self, and above the power of any Man to attain; or at least so much superior to his Abilities, that it is by no means possible for him ever to come up to it.

VI. A Sixth Source, from whence this general Blindness and Ignorance in Spiritual Concerns flows, I take to be a sort of Insensibility in Matters relating to Heaven and a future State. What may be the particular Occasion of things of this kind affecting us so very little, is not easy positively to determine; but plain it is, that things at hand give us a very tender Concern, while those at a distance scarce obtain one Thought from us. This may possibly be owing to a natural Levity of Temper, which disposes our Minds to great Seriousness, nay even Perplexity of Thought, upon very trifling Occasions, while we find it exceeding difficult to fix them upon Subjects of Weight and Consequence: Or it may proceed from an intemperate Fondness for our own Persons, which cannot away with Reflections so very shocking, as those of Death and our latter End: Or it may be the Effect of Luxury and extreme Effeminacy; a Life that deals in nothing, and can relish nothing, but Diversion and Merriment, and Pleasure. But be the Cause what it will, the Effect is but too manifest; that, while we walk on by no other Guidance but that of a dark and carnal Principle, and shut our Eyes against the better Suggestions of the Spirit, we lay aside all Care for the Soul, and expend all upon the Body; leave the Master in Captivity, to gratify the Slave; bestow our Thoughts upon the Affairs in which Mortality
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is concern'd, and entirely neglect the weightier Matters of Eternity. For how sedulous, how full of Contrivance do we see the Politician and busy Projector, to compass his Ends, and bring his Schemes to bear? What a perpetual Ferment of Mind is the ambitious Man under to raise himself? What Disquiets and Distractions is the covetous Man content to endure for the sake of a little Wealth? And how many Shifts, and Doubles, and subtle Plots, does the Wisdom of this World lay and employ in all its Pursuits; while every Prospect of a Christian, whose Ends alone are noble, and the Effect of true Wisdom, languish and die upon our hands? For indeed * the Men of this World set themselves to think of every thing with Industry and Application, except of that only thing, which deserves and would answer their utmost Application. How comes this Spirit and Behaviour to prevail now, so contrary to what we may observe reigning in Christians heretofore? Is it less our Duty or our Interest to work out our Salvation, than it was theirs, of whom St. *Chrysostom* speaks† so affectionately; who withdrew from the World into the most unfrequented Mountains and Deserts, and chose all the Horrors of Solitude, that Conversation

* Magna confusio, quod ardentius illi pernicioſa deſiderant quam nos Utilia. Citius ad mortem properant, quam nos ad vitam. *Bern. Ser. 1. de als. cord.*

† *Chrysostom* in *Matin.*

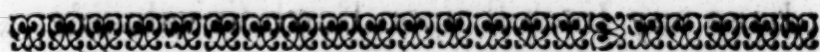
and the World might give no interruption to their holy Cares and heavenly Contemplations? They watered their Beds with their Tears, from that awful Dread of the last Judgment, with which their Hearts were possessed, and the constant View of that Day of Trembling and Astonishment, when the Son of Man shall call Mankind to account for their Works: All which dismal Scene, Meditation kept constantly before their Eyes. In pursuance of this Reflection it was, that those good Men humbled their Souls, by subduing so effectually, and by mortifying so very zealously their Body and its Appetites. And are we so much more secure of escaping at that terrible Day, than they were, that we are so much at ease? Is our Piety greater in proportion as our Fears and Concern are less? Or is it not rather a sort of spiritual Stupidity, which is proof against all Impressions of Goodness; and a thick Night of Corruption, that clouds our Understandings, and obstructs them from seeing things, as those bright Patterns saw them? Let us at least blush and be out of countenance, when our Manner of Living is compared with these devout Recluses; and if their Example will not inspire us with an equal Degree of Zeal, yet let it awaken us however out of our Sleep, and set those Powers and Affections on work, which are grown cold and unactive, through this spiritual Stupidity and Neglect.

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In a word, the Corruptions of the World, the Frailty of our Flesh, the common Infirmities, to which the Condition and Accidents of human Life expose us, the Ignorance and Levity natural to our Minds, the Errors and Extravagance of our Affections; the Charms of Prosperity, and the Depressions of Adversity, (both which conspire in weakning the Principle of Faith in us) the false View of human Reason, and the infinite Variety of Contingences in our Affairs, furnish ten thousand Occasions of this spiritual Blindness, and must of necessity destroy us, were it not for that Antidote and Defence, that Support and Strength, which the Law of Jesus Christ, by succouring and sustaining us with, does approve it self indeed a Well-spring of eternal Life, in every one of our Hearts. And this, O my God, it must be thy doing to render effectual: Thou, that makest Light to come out of Darkness, can't it also bring Knowledge out of Ignorance, by commanding thy Grace to shine in our Misery, and piercing our Hearts through with its enlivening Beams; thou only canst, in the Apostle's Phrase, make those to *become Vessels of thy Mercy*, which had deserved to be *Vessels of Wrath* and extreme Vengeance. And thou wilt do it, provided we do our part; the first Step whereof is to consider of what consequence this Affair is to us, which the Gospel hath taken care to represent as the Christian's *one*

Thing necessary. For nothing is more capable of quickening Men up to a due Care for their Salvation, than the raising their Thoughts by degrees toward Heaven ; and accustoming themselves to form noble and worthy Idea's of that unspeakable Reward, that infinite Happiness, which God hath prepared for them. This is the only Remedy against that Blindness Men are involved in upon the present Occasion. Let us therefore labour for that heavenly Wisdom, which may inspire a Christian with the same ardent Desires in pursuit of his Treasure in Heaven, which we daily observe in Worldlings for their perishing Treasures upon Earth : Let us not grudge to take as much pains for the saving our Souls, as they do for the filling their Bags and their Coffers : And, that we may the more easily vanquish all those Difficulties which attend us in our Way ; let us strengthen our selves with a vigorous and lively Faith, which may scatter those formidable Idea's, and fill us with bright Assurances of that Crown, which God hath promised and designed from our very first setting out ; and which will most certainly adorn the Head of every one that strives lawfully. For Faith is that divine Light, which opens to us that Immensity of the Years of God's Eternity, which *David* took care to keep perpetually in remembrance, (*Psal.* lxxvii.) This draws our Meditations up to Heaven, and discovers to

to us the Greatness and Majesty of that supreme God, who hath promised himself to be our Reward. In a word, Faith can best convince us how very important this Affair is, and which way it comes to be so: The full Representation whereof, I intend to make the Subject of my next Chapter.



C H A P. III.

Wherein the Mighty Importance of this Affair consists.

THE only Remedy to be applied for Cure of that evil Disease of which we have been hitherto discovering the Symptoms and Causes, is bringing the Christian to a right Sense, what Consequence this will be of to him. This is the Knowledge, which alone can be absolutely necessary: and all other Sciences ought to be indifferent in his esteem, because they are of no service towards securing him a happy Eternity: And certain it is, that the more strongly he is persuaded of the Usefulness and Necessity of this Knowledge, the more diligent he will be in the acquiring it. But still, let a Man's Application be never so great, yet in this holy Art there can but small progress be made, by them who walk only by their own Light.

The Understanding of Man is much too short and feeble, to fathom the depth of this Secret; and therefore do thou, O God, who alone canst comprehend the Worth and Greatness of that Glory promised to thy faithful Servants, do Thou send down a Ray from above; enlighten my Mind, that I may convince Men, that Christians cannot possibly have any Interest upon Earth so valuable, as may pretend to come in competition with that of their Souls, and Eternity.

Now this Importance seems chiefly to manifest it self by three Considerations.

First, The inestimable Excellence of that Glory which God hath prepared for the Saints.

Secondly, In the extraordinary Methods he is pleased to make use of for the effecting our Salvation.

Thirdly, In the terrible Consequences of that Eternal Doom, upon which the whole Issue of our Affairs at last must turn. To these I shall speak particularly,

The First is the Excellence of that Glory provided by God. For all the precious and most desirable Things of this World, are no better than Dross and Dung in comparison, or rather, are by no means fit so much as to be named or compared with it. The Holy Gospel, which describes things as they are, and affects no artful Exaggerations

tions to magnify them by, compares the Design of prosecuting this Salvation, to a *hidden Treasure* and a *Kingdom*; intimating, that a Man is truly enriched and becomes greater, from the Instant of his entertaining Desires and Resolutions of this kind. And that Prince in St. *Luke*, who left his own Country to conquer a foreign Kingdom, and take possession of it, is (according to the Allegorical Stile of the *New Testament*) a very lively Image of a Christian setting his Thoughts and Affections upon Heaven. Now, if the bare Designs and Endeavours of Salvation have something in them so truly great, so highly valuable, what can we think of the Prize itself which is thus pursued? And of what consideration can any other Affairs be, when weighed against this, since even the noblest Projects, and vastest Attempts our Minds are capable of, must of necessity sink and be buried in the Grave? This World hath nothing durable in it, except what tends to the promoting of this one Great Work: and whatever falls short of Eternal, ought to be of no great esteem, with Men who are endued with Immortal Souls. The wise and honourable Men of this World have not always the justest Notions of such Matters. God imparts the Sweets of his hidden Manna to meek and humble Souls; such as he inspires with a due Value for that incomprehensible Mystery, which

which he hath not revealed to the Proud. How happily was that eminent Martyr St. Ignatius let into this Secret, when, upon his Condemnation to die for the Truth, he cried out full of Rapture, * *Now I begin to be a Christian indeed, for I find in my self no Desires left of these Temporal Things that are seen.* And those Holy Saints, of whom the Book of Wisdom speaks, (Ch. iii.) had a true taste of it, which made the firmness of their Courage shine so conspicuously in the midst of Sufferings and Torments; because *their Hope was full of Immortality.* How comes it then to pass, that our Zeal is so faint and cold, in Tryals far inferior to those, in which the Strength and Fervour of these good Mens Minds was so conspicuous, so invincible? What Hopes had they, which we have not equal grounds for? Or what Recompence did their Religion propose, which ours does not assure us of? Is it not plain from this difference in our Behaviour, that Faith, which enflamed their Affections, is cold and almost quite extinct in our Breasts. Let us at least endeavour to revive and kindle it afresh, by the consideration of those Circumstances, which may assist us in passing a true Estimate upon that excellent Reward, which God hath promised and prepared for his Elect under the Gospel.

* Nunc incipio esse Christi Discipulus, nihil desiderans eorum quæ videntur. Hieron. de Scrip. Eccl.

But where shall I find Words large and expressive enough to set forth the glorious Heritage of the Children of God; the Greatness of that Kingdom, which is established for ever; the Vastness of that Treasure, that does not only exceed, but include, all other Riches and Treasures whatsoever; that Happiness so pure, so stable, so substantial, which the Prophet assures us, cannot fall within the compass of a human Understanding worthily to conceive them? And certainly, if God have imparted such Beauties to Creatures, in common estimation low and little; if he hath so admirably clothed the Lillies of the Field, and adorned our Gardens with such exquisite Art, as the Scriptures take notice (*Matth. vi.*) what Discoveries of his Goodness, must we in reason suppose will be made, when the infinite Riches of his Almighty Power shall be displayed, to make Man compleatly happy; Man, who is the Lord of the Creatures here below, and the wondrous Master-piece of the Creating Wisdom? What a glorious Scene will open in that Day, when God, whom we at present can only see darkly through the Glass of Faith and this thick Veil of Flesh, shall exhibit himself freely to the Spirits of Just Men made perfect, and admit them to a full sight and fruition of all his Beauty and Majesty? How great must the Truth and Substance needs be, whose Shadows are so bright,

bright, whose distant Figures are so full of Wonder? For if some eminent Philosophers have look'd for Happiness in the sedate Contemplation of the Heavens, and other beautiful Works of Nature, what ravishing Delights will overflow that Soul, which shall be admitted to know, and familiarly converse with Thee, our Great God? to see the Secrets of Thy Essence, and dive into that Abyss of Perfection, which Thou hast thought fit as yet to place far above, out of our sight; to observe the infinite Fruitfulness of that productive Spirit, which is the Source of all thy Emanations; and understand the mysterious and now incomprehensible Designs, which at present we must be content humbly to adore in thy Providence and Government of the World? And how transporting shall be the Pleasure of possessing Thee, by virtue of that Knowledge, which our blessed Saviour hath taught us is *Eternal Life*, and the very thing in which the Happiness of the Saints consists. Oh! Blessed sure is that Believer, who, tired and sick of the Creatures, shall throw himself into the Bosom of the Creator, and there enjoy perfect Tranquillity; like a skilful and prosperous Pilot, who after being toss'd with Storms at Sea, puts into Port, and makes himself amends for all the Hazard and Trouble of his boisterous Voyage!

Then

Then shall that vast Extent of the Human Mind, which is the true, the distinguishing Character of its Greatness and Excellence, be fully satisfied. Then shall the natural Restlessness of Man's Desires be composed and quieted, which here seek Ease in vain, and aim at every thing, but can find nothing able to content them; his utmost Cravings shall then be answered, for God himself will be his exceeding great Reward. He will fill these most capacious Souls of ours to the full, with the abundance of his Perfections *. In him they shall be sure to find all they can desire; and He alone to them will be All in All. They shall enjoy the same refined Delights with God himself. And Joy shall then be the very Life and Soul of this blessed Life. Every Subject of this everlasting Kingdom shall be himself a King, *Rev. xv.* and each of the Faithful placed upon the Throne of God. The Body and Soul both shall there be full of Bliss. For Tears and Troubles, and Pains, which now waste the Body; Discontents, and Disquiets, and Fears, and every uneasy Resentment, which here afflict the Soul, shall be for ever banished from those blissful Mansions; as the beloved Apostle

* Plenitudo quam expectamus à Deo non erit nisi de Deo.
Bern. Serm. 111. in cap. 1. Cant.

Omnia nobis ipse erit, quando ipso sufficiente nihil deerit.
August. lib. contra Serm. Arrian. cap. 37.

in his Revelation hath positively assured us, (Chap. xxi.) In a word, how great must that Recompence reserved in Heaven for us needs be, when the distant Hope of it, which we conceive but imperfectly in this World, is attended with heavenly Delight; a Delight more pure, more entertaining, than all the Pleasures this World can afford!

And is it possible now for Men to assent to these Truths, and think at all, and yet not be very sensibly affected with the Reflection? Can we be satisfied of the Value of our heavenly Prize, and not thirst and pant continually after it? What wretched Stupidity is this, to be more fond of our Misery and Weakness, than of a State of absolute Perfection; to prefer the Decay of the *Old* Man before the never-fading Youth and Beauties of the *New*; and wish more eagerly for the Storms of this troublesome Life, than for the profound and settled Calm of Eternity? Can we after all this have the senseless to put the good Things of this World, into the Balance against those of Heaven; and so much as admit them to the honour of a Comparison, when, if we had no other Arguments to prove their Insufficiency, the very Enjoyment of them will abundantly convince us of their Vanity and Imperfection? For there is not any one Pleasure in this Life, which when freely indulged, does not end in Pain and Uneasiness:

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The most exquisite Sweets here have a mixture of Bitter in their Composition; but every thing above is sincere and complete, without the least Allay to take from its Relish and Enjoyment. This made the Royal Prophet break forth, (*Psal. lxxxiv.*) *How amiable are thy Dwellings, thou Lord of Hosts! My Soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord; my Heart and my Flesh crieth out for the Living God.* And these Desires are usual with true Believers, whose eager Wishes are upon their beloved Country; and, in the same proportion that these Desires after everlasting Felicities grow stronger, in the very same does their Indifference and Disrelish of temporal Enjoyments increase. Let us then imitate these holy Men; let us qualify our selves for Heaven by devout and hearty Desires at least, and thus supply that Merit, which Works must want. For the Life of a Christian indeed ought to be one continued eager Desire after Heaven.

And shall we suppose, that so precious a Treasure is not richly worth all the trouble we can possibly be at to obtain it? Can this Life, that is but a Scene of Misery, short at the longest, deceitful at the best: Can this deserve a higher Place in our Affections, than all that Glory, with which the infinite Power and Goodness of God hath decreed to crown his faithful and chosen ones? We could not
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be insensible how weighty these Considerations are, did we but rightly comprehend our Interest in them. But alas! Heaven is a Mystery, even to them that believe; and, with them who do not, this Mystery passes for a Fable. The best Notions we have of it are so short and imperfect, that it is not much to be wondered at, if the Hopes grounded upon them have no stronger effect upon our Minds. For indeed it is so vastly above our largest Idea's, that we may allow it in some sense incomprehensible. But since this is a Difficulty arising only from the surpassing Excellence of the thing, it will perhaps be more proper for me to advise Men, that they would employ their Thoughts much upon it, and by frequent and serious Meditation raise their Idea's of it to as worthy a pitch as they are able, than to spend more time in enlarging upon a Subject, which I most freely acknowledge, no Words, and much less mine, can be sufficient for.

II. The Second Consideration, which may be of some service to us, towards comprehending the great Importance of our Salvation, consists of those extraordinary Means, which Almighty God hath been pleased to make use of for the effecting it. For what Probability is there, that all the greatest and most wonderful Springs of his Almighty Power should be set on work, if the Design to be brought about were not proportionably noble?

ble? We may easily be satisfied in that Providence by which Nature is governed, that he will not interpose his sovereign Power upon trivial Occasions; and yet that he does manifestly so order Matters, that all the Frame of Nature is made instrumental to the Glory of the Saints. And Reason good; since all, that depends upon Time, ought to pay Homage to Eternity. Now, although the general Conduct of Providence in the Administration of this lower World be in a great measure concealed from us, yet thus much we may be satisfied of, that nothing comes to pass here upon Earth, but it hath some respect to God's Decree of saving his Elect. Because the Dispensation of Nature is inferior to that of Grace, and the Things that are temporal ought to be subordinate to those that are eternal. This Consideration probably moved the Prophet to say, that *all God's Ways were wonderful in Judgment*, (Deut. xxxii.) And thus at last we learn, that this World, which employs all the Study of Learned and Speculative, and the busy Contrivances of Politick and Intriguing Men, is made purely for the sake of another, an Invisible, World; and the Creator orders the Movements and Changes of the one so, that each of them should conduce to the establishing of the other. This long universal Chain of Causes and Effects: The regular Succession of those Events so various in human

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Life;

+ Life ; that wise Order, which governs and directs the unseen Springs of the divine Operations, and every Accident that comes to pass in the common Course of the World, are for the advantage of God's Chosen. The
 + secret Tendency and Relation, which temporal Things have to such Men's eternal Happiness, is one of the sublimest and most amazing Mysteries of Providence. Nay, as the Scripture acquaints us, that the Heathen Nations were chastised to be a Warning and Instruction to his own People ; so is the Imperfection of those, who are not the chosen and faithful of God, ordered to the Benefit and Perfection of such as are. 'Tis to build up this holy and peculiar Nation, that he pulls down and roots out others. Even the Revolutions of whole States and Kingdoms, and the most concerning Events in the Affairs of this World, are sometimes the Instruments God thinks fit to use, for the Salvation of those, whom he hath chosen Partakers of his Glory. Such mysterious Proceedings as these in this great Work, occasioned that Exclamation of St. Paul, (*Rom. xi. 33.*) *Oh the depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Goodness of God ! how unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out !* This is the Power, which the Son of God hath received from his Father, to be the Lord and Disposer of temporal Life, for the procuring Men eternal Life ; and to ex-

ercise an absolute Dominion over the Flesh, in order to saving and exalting the Spirit. And, though God bear no share in the Wickedness of Men, nor is his Holiness accountable in any degree, for those Acts of Impiety and Injustice, which he gives them the power of committing; yet does he so far interest himself even in these Matters, as frequently to leave some very remarkable Footsteps of his supreme Equity, nay even of his Goodness, in the very greatest Disorders that happen in the World. He over-rules the Passions of wicked Men so, that they shall sometimes plainly illustrate his Justice, or give distinguishing Marks of his Mercy. Thus the Conquest of the Jews by Foreigners, their long Bondages, in *Egypt* first, and afterwards in *Babylon*, were so contrived as to be most glorious Instances of his Favour to the Afflicted; and to produce many bright Patterns of Piety and Virtue, as well as to leave behind them some Footsteps of true Religion, and the Knowledge of the one Supreme God. Our Saviour himself declares, (*Matt. xxiv.*) that *for the Elect's sake those Days of Terror should be shortned*: Which he there describes as so dangerous a Trial of their Faith and Patience. And we shall not think this + Matter overstrained by affirming, that, for the sake of making one Saint, God may think fit to overturn whole Empires, when we consider of what vast extent that Passage of St.

Paul is to the Primitive Christians, *All things are for your sakes.*

These are indeed very profound and mysterious Truths, Designs laid too deep, and in themselves too vast, for us to comprehend: But though we cannot understand them, yet, provided we have an humble Faith, we may be assured of them beyond all reasonable doubt; I say, provided we apply our selves to observe the Methods of Providence, which God himself hath discovered to us. For if he took delight to humble other Nations, in favour and advantage of his own People; if he sacrificed *Egypt*, *Ethiopia*, and *Saba*, and so many other Kingdoms besides, to the Temporal Interest of the Jews, (as *Isaiab* tells us he did, Ch. xliii.) what may we not reasonably expect him to do, for the Eternal Happiness of them who love and serve him? The Way, by which he led that People to the Promised Land, was full of Miracles in every part of it: He opened the Depths of the Sea, to bring them out of Slavery, and constrained the very Elements to make a passage for his Freed-men; he overturn'd the Walls of a strong City with the Sound of Trumpets, to settle them peaceably in the Country he had mark'd out for them. The Mouths of ravening Lions were closed up at his Word, for the preservation of *Daniel*; and the Rage of devouring Flames stopp'd, to pay a due regard to the

Purity of the three Children thrown into the burning fiery Furnace, for refusing to worship an Idol : And, upon many other Emergencies, he hath changed and inverted the ordinary Course of Nature, by strange unheard-of Prodigies, to signalize his Protection and Favour of that Race of Men, whom he had chosen out for Temporal Prosperity. And can we imagine, that he will — be more sparing towards that Spiritual Seed, whom he hath appointed to Happiness in Heaven ? St. *Paul* was plainly of another mind, when he told the Christians (1 *Cor. x.*) that all the Miracles of the Law were yet but Shadows and Figures of the stupendous things to be done for bringing Men to Grace and Glory. Let us then observe the publick Calamities, the Devastations of Countries, the Change and Translation of Empires, the Revolutions of States, the Rise and Fall of Kings and Commonwealths, which happen in the World ; but so observe, as to consider them, like so many Red-Seas for the spiritual *Israel*, the Friends of God, to pass over, while his Enemies perish in the Waters. These are the hideous barren Deserts, through which Believers travel to Heaven, of which the Land of *Canaan* was but a poor Representation. These are the Walls of *Jericho* tumbled down, that God upon their Ruins may build the City of the Faithful, even *Jerusalem* which is above. For

the Honour, nay the Goodness of God is concerned in afflicting and destroying those here, whom he intends to save hereafter: And the Loss he suffers them to sustain at present, is frequently one of his most valuable Blessings. He is severe for a moment, with intentions of everlasting Kindness afterwards. And these present seeming Neglects and Desertions are a sort of affectionate and tender Cruelties, such as God himself represents to us by his Prophet, (*Isai. liv.*) *In a little Wrath I hid my Face from thee for a Moment, but with everlasting Kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.*

Now this Manner of Proceeding manifestly shews us, what Notions we ought to entertain of Salvation, and the mighty Consequence of it to us; since hence we perceive, that nothing is of any consideration in God's Esteem, which is not eternal. All other Matters are made subservient to that one great Concern, and even contemptible in comparison of it. He raised and preserved *Pharaoh* upon his Throne, that by the humbling that proud obstinate Sinner, he might make his Power to be known in the *Israelites* Deliverance. And many times the Mighty are exalted, not so much for their own sakes, as for the advantage of the Humble and Meek.

+ Thus publick Desolations, overturning of Kingdoms, bringing down the Princes and Powers

Powers of the Earth, and the most general Mischiefs, which we are used to feel or fear in our personal or politick Capacities, are a very small matter in God's account. Man's only true Interest is the Interest of his Soul and another Life; and the weightiest Affairs of this World, even the Government of Kingdoms, and all the Grandeurs mortal Men are capable of, should only be valued by him, so far as they may become instrumental to his Honour and higher Elevation in Heaven. Ah! did we seriously believe these Truths, we should not be so tenderly affected with the Afflictions and Reproaches of the World, nor so unreasonably fond of its false Pleasures, and perishing Enjoyments. Our Hearts and every Desire of our Souls would then be fix'd on no other Object but Heaven, because we must be sensible, that this is the only Object worthy the Hopes and eager Wishes of them, who are Christians indeed.

This Importance is capable of yet farther Illustration, by considering that Ministry of the Angels, which God makes use of for promoting the Salvation of Mankind. For the Scripture acquaints us, that these divine Spirits, the noblest and most perfect of all created Beings, *are yet sent forth as Ministering Spirits, to minister for them who shall be Heirs of Salvation*, (Heb. i. 14.) And, tho' their common Employment be thought to consist in regulating the Course of the Stars, —

distinguishing the Seasons, moving the secret Springs by which this great Machine of the World is acted, and assisting in the constant Administration of Nature in general ; yet do they hold no part of their Business more noble, more worthy their native Excellence, or think themselves at any time better employed, than when they are appointed Guardians and Centinels to particular Christians; and so far imitate their great Master, who came into the World for no other purpose, but purely to lay himself out upon Man's Salvation.

Another thing, which ought to raise our Esteem for this Salvation, is that mighty and continual Watchfulness, so earnestly press'd by our Saviour in the Gospel. For how many figurative Expressions are made use of there, to make us sensible of the very urgent Necessity, which lies upon us, to prosecute this Affair, which yet cannot be finished without such strict, such indispensable Application? Those Parables of the *Talents*, The *Marriage-Feast*, The *Wise and Foolish Virgins*, The *Labourers in the Vineyard*, The *unfaithful Servant cast into utter Darkness*, The *Steward accused of wasting his Master's Goods*; and all those other Representations so usual in the Gospel, are so many Admonitions from our Lord to every Christian, obliging him to watch without ceasing, to keep a strong Guard over himself, and to remit no part of that Diligence,

gence, which so great an Undertaking requires. For, besides that God hath his particular Seasons, and favourable Opportunities, for doing Men good, which it behoves them narrowly to observe, that they may not slip by lost and unimproved; we must remember, that Death comes like a Thief in the Night, and woe be to us if we be surprized asleep. To this we may add the extreme Hazard and Danger of a Life exposed to continual Storms, and a thousand other Considerations, which ought to engage us in a most indefatigable Diligence. In short: The Time draws on; the Life of Man is but of short continuance; the first Step he takes in it, is an Advance towards Death; the Track of an Arrow shot in the Air; the Flight of a Bird; the Scudding of a Vessel before the Wind; such are the Images painting to us the Swiftneſs of our Motion through this World, (*Wisd. v. 10, 11, 12.*) The Day is now broke upon us, but the Night presses forward apace. *Yet a little while* (says our blessed Saviour, *John xii. 35.*) *is the Light with you; walk while ye have the Light, lest Darkneſs come upon you.* And that terrible Hour of Death, which determines our State for all Eternity, hath Horror enough in it to make the best Men tremble; when they reflect upon the absolute Holiness, the inflexible Justice of God, and the depth of those Judgments, which are so full of Wonder, so very different from the
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Judgments of frail and sinful Men, and therefore so little to be understood by us.

But after all; nothing does so demonstratively prove the vast Importance of this Affair, as the great Things, which the Son of God hath condescended to do and suffer for our Salvation. He was content, not only to appear an Object of Contempt in the Eyes of Men, by leading a Life of Meekness, and Poverty; but, that he might bear the utmost Rigour of the extreme Malediction, which our Offences had incurred, he was content to take upon him the Representation of our Guilt too; and to appear in the likeness of *sinful* Flesh. And here what shall I say, what rather shall I need to say, of the Humiliations he underwent, and how he *emptied himself*, both in the Afflictions of his Life, and in the Shame and Tortures of his Death? Now we have all the Reason in the world to believe, that he, who is the infallible and essential Wisdom of God the Father, would not have had recourse to Methods so extraordinary, so astonishing, so unparallell'd, if the Design carried on by them had not deserved all this Expence. Hence, without question it is, that the Prophet, mentioning our Saviour's Passion, calls it the *Revealing*, or the *Making bare the Arm of the Lord*, (Isai. lii, liii.) intimating hereby, that it was the noblest and greatest Work of Omnipotence it self. The utmost Strength and Vir-
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tue whereof, St. *Paul* tells us, he hath wisely concealed, under the seeming Weakness of his Death, (1 *Cor.* i.) that human Wisdom might be evidently convicted of having no part in this glorious Work. And how glorious must it be indeed, how infinite the Consequence of that Salvation, which was thought a fit Purchase for the Blood and Death of God!

Again, This Importance does not only declare it self by the incomprehensible Mysteries and Miracles, which God hath vouchsafed to work for the Salvation of Man; but likewise by the End or Consequence of these Things upon us; which are so very terrible, that nothing less than an Eternity of Torments, or an Eternity of Bliss and Glory must be the certain Fate of each of us at last. Eternity! O blessed God! Thou, who alone canst measure its extent, help me to conceive it. For our Souls are too narrow to entertain a just Idea of Rewards and Punishments, without Measure, and without End. Oh the Heighth, and Depth, and Length, and Breadth of Eternity! how far they exceed the utmost Range of Thought! O Death! how great a Concern art thou to us! Thou, which must determine our Fate, and fix us in one of those unalterable Extremes! And what Application then, what Caution, what Watchfulness can be too great, to prepare us for the Decision of so very great an Issue! For surely
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† that which must of necessity come to an end, is not worthy to be compared with that, which never can be subject to Change or Conclusion. And then, how lamentable is the Folly of those thoughtless Men, who hazard Eternity, for a Pleasure that dies in an instant; nay indeed, who, upon any the most plausible account, are content to lose an endless Kingdom, for the preservation of a Life, that lasts but for a Moment? To be short: The Salvation of Mankind is to be sure of great concern, because this is the only Work of God designed to endure always. For all his other Productions shall be destroyed; *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, and all the Elements shall be dissolved and burnt up*; but that blessed Eternity, reserved for the Christians Recompence, shall never pass away. This is that glorious Master-piece, not of the Wisdom of Man, or of this World, but entirely God's own, which St. Paul preached, (1 Cor. ii. 7.) even *that hidden Wisdom, which God ordained before the World unto our Glory; which none of the Princes of this World knew, and of which it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

I might enforce the former Considerations, by adding the almost insuperable Difficulties, that beset us in our Way to Heaven. I might
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set before Men an Image of that dreadful Tribunal, where we must all be judged ; the Extremity of God's Vengeance, and the Severity of his Examination and Judgment. I might shew, what Precipices there lie on each Side this narrow Way ; what false Paths to mislead us ; and how full of Hazard our Voyage is, through a Sea full of Rocks, and Quickfands, and frequent Shipwracks : I might urge the Uncertainty of Life, the sudden Surprize of Death, whereof every Day convinces us by sad Experience, and most deplorable Examples ; for, alas ! after how uncomfortable a manner do the generality of Christians go out of the World ! I might make Men sensible, what Enemies they have to deal with, how many, how powerful, how hard to be withstood successfully ; how formidable the Prince of Darkness is to the Children of Light ; what Snares that lying Spirit lays for us ; how full of Artifice, and Cheat, and Disguise to impose upon us ; the Levity and Weakness of our own Heart in the whole Course of this tiresome Journey ; while the World is perpetually fighting, and beating down our good Resolutions from without, and our own Passions as incessantly rebelling and undermining us within. I might press our Saviour's Warning, that we should *strive* the more vehemently *to enter in at the strait Gate*, because *few there be that go in thereat*. And lastly, I might enlarge upon that

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— Mystery of Predestination, by which God distributes the Means, and Opportunities, and Assistances of his Graces, at such Times, in such Measures, and to such Persons, as he sees fit; that Mystery, in which St. *Paul* and St. *Augustin* have laboured to such excellent purpose, for the vindication of the Mercy, and the Justice of God and the Freedom of his Grace. And happy is that Christian, who can with such becoming Modesty contemplate this Mystery, as to admire the deep Counsels of the most High; to comfort himself in his Wisdom without abusing his Goodness; and tremble at his Justice without distrusting his Mercy. Against the Rock of this Decree many unwary and unstable Souls have split. Chiefly, because this Pride could not content it self with continuing ignorant of things, which God hath made it impossible for mortal Man fully to know. May I avoid their dangerous Arrogance, and with profound Reverence adore the Mercies of my good — God, without making bold Attempts to discover what he hath thought fit to conceal; or saucily intruding within that Veil, which he, to check our Presumption and Curiosity, hath interposed on purpose to hide the Creator from his Creature's sight!

Such are the Notions, such the Estimate, which every Christian ought to have of his Salvation: And such in all reason have he must, did he but set himself to consider, the
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Glory which God hath prepared for him, the wonderful Means made use of to redeem and qualify him for it, and the Consideration where all this must end at last; all which, if at all applied to Men's Consciences, cannot but manifest to them the indispensable Obligation every one lies under, to consider seriously of the Matter, and labour with all his Might to work out his Salvation. For that is the Effect I desire from my former Discourse, that this Affair alone may be thought, as it really is alone, valuable and great, and all besides despicable and little. And, since the Son of God (as *St. Chrysostom* says) places his Honour and Glory in our Salvation; let us at least think that our only Wisdom, which he esteems his greatest Honour; and shew that we do so, by removing the Obstructions to it, and acquainting our selves with the Means proper to that purpose.



C H A P. IV.

The Principal Obstructions to this great Work.

WHEN once the Christian is thoroughly persuaded, how important this Affair of saving his Soul is, and, consequent to that Persuasion, feels a true Desire of effecting

—fecting it; that holy Wisdom, which Flesh
—and Blood hath not revealed, nor any Study
—or human Industry acquired, but the Grace of
—God only does or can infuse into his Heart;
this Wisdom, I say, begins to cast about for
the best and safest Course, in a way so thick
beset with Briars and Thorns, with Difficul-
ties and Dangers. This is that Principle,
mentioned by St. *James* (Chap. iii.) which
descending from above, enlightens the Un-
derstanding, purifies the Affections, and gives
him a true Relish of God and Heavenly
Things.

✦ But we greatly mistake the matter, if we
think this can be attained on a sudden: It
— is a Persuasion bred by long Perseverance
— in Goodness, by substantial Piety and tried
Virtue; and the Fruit of that Wisdom,
which God teaches us by the outward Mi-
nisty of the Word, and impresses upon our
— Hearts by the inward Workings of his Di-
vine Grace. For it is by no means sufficient
to our present purpose, that the Light of
Faith, (which is the true Principle of Chri-
stian Wisdom) teach a Man that all Tem-
poral Things ought to be despised, and that
such only as are Eternal ought to be valued;
unless it do withal inspire that humble Vi-
gilance, and zealous Circumspection, requi-
site for them, whose Business it is to disco-
ver the true Way to Heaven, and decline
all that may hinder our Progress in, or en-
danger

danger the misleading and turning us out of it. By this means only can we take right Measures, and make directly up to that Port, where we would be : For the Life of a Christian in this World, is like a Ship upon an uncertain and dangerous Sea, it stands in need of continual Care ; its first Care then must be to take all things out of the way, which may obstruct our Salvation ; as in the management of worldly Business, Men begin with clearing themselves of their Impediments. But let us see what those things are, which are most likely to embroil and intercept us in this Undertaking, that we may be the better able to provide against them.

I do not think it necessary upon this occasion to say any thing upon the points of Infidelity, and Heresy, and Schism. For though these are the most essential and formidable Obstructions, yet I suppose myself addressing to Persons free of them, that is, to true Believers. All I shall add to this purpose, will be, that, according to the ordinary Methods of the Christian Dispensation, no Salvation is to be had out of that truly Catholick Church, which is built upon the firm and immoveable *Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner-stone* ; out of that Flock, which this good Shepherd

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feeds

feeds with his own Flesh and Blood. It is a certain Truth, to hold and propagate Opinions contrary to this Church, and not to submit to the Doctrines she hath received and faithfully taught, is a thing the most opposite in the world to Salvation. For the only way of being united to Jesus Christ, as our Head, is by keeping united to this mystical Body of his, as Members of its Communion: And for them, who exclude and separate themselves, they are the Stray-Sheep, that refuse to hear and follow the Voice of the true Shepherd.

I. The First Obstacle then, which I shall insist upon is Pride; and such it must needs prove, since Fear, and a Distrust of ourselves is the very * Ground-work on which Salvation must be built. Those natural Branches broken off to make way for grafting in the Branches of the wild Olive, which St. *Paul* hath so admirably descanted on, *Rom. xi.* The Jews, who were set aside to open a Passage for the Gentiles to come into the Church; because the Insolence of this People, once the peculiar Favourites of God, had forfeited the continuance of his Grace to them; ought to convince us, how great and fatal a Hindrance to being saved

* Timor Salutis Fundamentum est; Præsumptio Impedimentum. *Tertul.*

Presumption always is: For in truth, the very Character of a Believer consists in Submission and Lowliness of Mind. It is a mighty Mistake to suppose, that Quaintness of Reasoning is necessary to Salvation, or that Men are expected to give a distinct and full Account of every Article of Faith. Men are not saved by Subtlety of Discourse, but by the Simplicity and Honesty of Belief. The Light from Heaven can only guide us in our Way thither, the *Ignes Fatui* of this World can do us no service in this Passage. God only can shew us the Way, and assist us in it; *it is not in Man that walketh* (as the Prophet observes, *Jer. x. 23.*) *to direct his own Steps.* Penetration and Judgment sanctify no Man. This is the Work of Humility and Innocence. For ye see your Calling, Brethren, says St. Paul, *how that not many wise Men after the Flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, that no Flesh should glory in his presence,* (1 Cor. i. 27, 29.) and that the wise Men of this World might be left in, and convinced of their real Folly. Thus it was that the Jews undid themselves, by presuming upon the supposed Righteousness of their own Works,

and growing vain and insolent upon this Supposition. The meek and humble Conversation of Jesus, his ignominious Death and Sufferings gave them offence; and *thus they stumbled and fell at that Stone of stumbling*, as the Apostle observes. For such they rendered him to themselves, by being scandalized at the mighty Condescensions of his divine Love. Pride made them ingrateful, and Ingratitude provoked God to reject them. For he, *who giveth Grace to the Humble*, sets his Face against the Proud; by overspreading their Hearts with thick Darkness, and turning that Wisdom into Folly, the presumptive Vanity of which he designs to punish. *Those Branches* (says St. Paul) *were broken off, because of their Unbelief; and thou standest by Faith. Be not then high-minded but fear,* (Rom. xi. 20.) For, if God shewed himself so severe to his own favourite People, if he did not spare the natural Branches of that Tree, which exalted itself against him, *take heed lest he also spare not thee.* Let us not therefore abuse and injure ourselves with any false Confidence in our own Merits; + the best and most blameless Conversation, if allayed with Arrogance, is a greater bar to Grace and Salvation, than great Guilt with Humility proportionable; and the Sinner, who wholly distrusts himself, and casts his
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Confidence upon the Mercy of God, is more pleasing to him, than the haughty Pharisaical Righteous.

Let us then humble ourselves before God, that we may be accounted worthy of his Grace : Let us not depend upon our Senses, which Faith hath commanded to be silent in these matters, as things too far above them ; let us not wander after our own private Opinions, to forsake the Doctrine of the Gospel and the Christian Church ; but be humble and teachable, remembering that Submission is the great thing Faith requires of us. Its Mysteries are so astonishing, that, even after their Accomplishment, Submission is necessary to the Belief of them. When we take upon ourselves to be our own Guides, we shall go astray ; when Reason is made the Standard of every Point, and the Authority of Revelation disputed, Ruin and Destruction will be the end of it : For God confounds the Proud in their own Errors, and punishes their voluntary, with a judicial Darkness. Thus he dealt with the Jews, who bore themselves high upon their own Righteousness ; and it was an exemplary Instance of his Justice to cast off an arrogant Generation, and take another more meek and obedient into Favour. Let us then avoid their Crime, that we may escape their Punishment. To trust in our own Holiness,

is in effect to be a Jew. The Christian's fastest course, is to fear always ; to work with trembling ; to suspect and absolutely distrust himself ; to place his hope and confidence entirely in the Mercy of a forgiving God ; and thus we shall keep clear of the first great Obstacle to Salvation, which is Pride.

II. The Second is a Worldly Mind ; a Spirit of Pleasure and Effeminacy, of Luxury and Wantonness, of Vanity and Ambition, of Project and Intrigue, of criminal Engagements and Passions, of Treachery and Disguise ; and all the other Vices, which make Mens Dispositions and Practices irregular, and tend to Debauchery and a general Dissoluteness of Manners. For, from the instant that Men are intoxicated with the Sweets of the World, their relish for God and Heaven droops and decays ; so that, considering the consequence, a Man cannot hold correspondence with these sensual Delights, and still preserve his Innocence. I speak not of the World in general, that corrupt part of it, where love of Pleasure is the reigning Principle ; that reprobate part, for which our Saviour forbore to pray, (*John* xvii. 9.) though he disdained not to intercede for those very Wretches that crucified him. 'Tis true, the Splendour and gaudy Outside is apt to dazle our Sight ; this debauches our Judgment, and disposes

us to take Counterfeit for Truth, and Shadows for Substance ; as it tempts us again to despise Reality and Excellence, for Emptiness and Trifle. Time, which flies swiftly from these Men, affects them ; Eternity with all its Perfections can make no impression ; and a little in present Possession contents them better than the largest Hopes and firmest Assurances in Reversion only. But since this false Lustre will quickly vanish, since even the whole Scheme of this World disappears like a Vapour, let us be before-hand with it, and undeceive ourselves betimes. Let us decline the World, and the Children of the World, and, as little as may be, come within the corrupt Air they breathe ; for all about is infectious, and we cannot converse with them, but to the prejudice of our Virtue. A gay Lady for instance, let her Behaviour otherwise be never so blameless, and her Conduct never so discreet, yet contracts a Soil, by those very Inclinations to Vanity, which she cherishes, in labouring to recommend her Person, and affecting to be admired. It is to no purpose to pretend to Purity in the midst of Corruption, or promise ourselves Safety in the midst of Pleasure and Temptation. This contagious Breath of the World is a great Obstruction to Goodness ; and those Airs and Modes —
People engage in, by conversing and complying

plying with the World, poison the Mind by degrees, and taint all that come within the sphere of their Venom. Now to avoid this Danger, we shall do well to imitate that holy Bishop, who wrote his Friend word, that * the *World was now grown too gross to put upon him any longer ; and if we* (says he) *would leave off cheating ourselves, it would not be in the power of the World to cheat us.* So perfectly was this good Man aware of the Falshood and Treachery of the World, and all its subtle Artifices to deceive us. We read in the
 † Lives of the Fathers, that *Macarius*, passing the River *Nile*, converted a Gentleman by one single Sentence, which opened his Eyes, and convinced him at once of the true State and Value of things. *We* (says he) *who have devoted ourselves to God, laugh at the Folly of the World, and despise it ; and the World despises and makes Fools of you, who give yourselves up to it. Love not then the World, neither the things that be in the World,* according to *St. John's* Advice to his Disciples ; for if any Man love the World, the Love of the Fa-

* Vix jam habet Mundus ut fallat ; periit illa imago rerum ad decipiendum usque decora ; nisi nosmet ipsos decipimus p[er]ne Mundus decipere non potest. *Eucher. ad Valer.*

† *Ruffin. in Vit. Patr. l. 2.*

ther is not in him. Help us then, O our God, in this distress; break the Chains that entangle and fasten us down to the World, and hinder our advancing in the Way which thou hast shewed, to lead us to thy self. Scatter this thick Cloud, and take off the Scales of Vanity and Self-love from before our Eyes, which put out false Lights, and turn us out of our right Path. For after all; this mighty Lustre and Grandeur of the World is but a Bubble, a meer Nothing; and God when he intends to punish these great Sinners who despise him, needs no severer Method, than the leaving them destitute in all that Emptiness and Want, which they have so foolishly preferred before the Light of his Wisdom, and the Riches of his Goodness.

III. A Third Obstruction in this Matter, which hath indeed great affinity with that last mentioned, is Prosperity. When *David* became victorious over his Enemies; and had gained quiet Possession of the Throne, then he fell so foully into Sin. Success betrayed him to Idleness and Effeminacy; and he was never undone, till he — thought himself absolutely safe. For Prosperity is the Rock, upon which great Souls are most apt to split, because it begets Levity, and Inconstancy, and disposes Men to lay aside that Seriousness and Caution, which

which Circumstances of another kind make necessary to them. When a Man is grown successful and lives at his ease, he begins to be fond of Life; and loth at any rate to quit a Condition, which at the best is but a Shadow of Death, a Valley of Tears, a Prison, where we are hemm'd in with Miseries on every side. And, in regard that Greatness, and Plenty, and Power, breed in Men a fatal Remissness, and Disregard of Christianity and a future State, they cannot but be a terrible Hindrance in our Way to Salvation. I would not be mistaken, as if this Obstruction were necessary and in the very nature of the thing: For *David*, and *Abraham*, and *Constantine*, and several other great Persons, we have reason to conclude, are now glorified Saints. But in the Event it is so; and morally speaking, 'tis exceeding difficult to be great, and not corrupted by Greatness: And to be Rich, and not make an ill Use of Riches. A more than ordinary Proportion of Grace, great Moderation and Temper, and a Virtue above the common Standard are required, to keep such Persons within the Bounds of their Duty. Less than this will not suffice to preserve Innocence and Prosperity together. *Tertullian* found some difficulty to conceive the Power of this World, and the Resignation of a Christian, meeting in
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the same Person. And it is one of the Miracles peculiar to our Religion, that it inspires the Honourable with Modesty, and the Successful with strict Justice. Many a Man is ruined by Plenty and Promotion, who would have been happy for ever, if he had continued in a meaner Station. While Honour and Riches exalt the Mind, all the Admonitions to Holiness, and the most concerning Truths of the Gospel are lost upon it. And where will all this mighty Pomp end at last? The greatest Prince is but like an Actor upon the Stage. When the Play is at an end, and Death shuts the Scene, all is over; and what refined Madness would it be, for any Christian for so short an Enjoyment, to forego the true Greatness and durable Glories of Eternity? Fame hath perhaps founded your Name all the World over; and Mankind have been astonished at your good fortune; your Ambition hath advanced you to the highest pitch of Honour; this is your Case to-day; but to-morrow you shall die, and what becomes of you then? What will you do to all Eternity, if in this Span of Time you have forgotten God, and violated your own Conscience? To be short; Prosperity carries a secret Poison in it, which taints all other Means of Salvation to that degree, that ordinarily they become
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+ of little or no effect. The Calls of Grace to the Christian Faith; the Seal of Baptism; the Use of the Sacraments; the Exhortations from the Pulpit; your own Prayers; your natural Probity of Mind, and all your other hopeful Qualities, lose their force, and are defeated, when they meet with great Honours, and great Riches. For, besides that these commonly vitiate the Affections, the Hardship is increased by their Contrariety to the Christian Religion: For this is of a quite different Temper; a Profession of Humility, and Suffering, and Poverty of Spirit. Hence the Wise Man observes, that God often *gives Men*
 — *Riches to their hurt*; he distributes the Wealth of this World to the Proud and
 — Covetous, and reserves the Treasures of the next for the Lowly and Meek. He appoints Humiliation and Trouble for his
 — Friends, the better to fit them for Glory
 — with himself; and leaves Honour and Plenty for Reprobates: These things he deals promiscuously, and often suffers the worst of Men to enjoy them, in the midst of their Impieties. But then this is the whole of their Portion; and the Severity of his Justice is laid up for them, who here despise the Abundance of his Mercy.

— IV. The Fourth Obstruction is that Lukewarmness of Soul reproved by the Angel in the
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the Revelation (Ch. iii.) as a Disposition, the most directly opposite of any to the Business of Salvation. For this, in the midst even of the most religious Duties, casts in a sort of Disrelish, which cools Mens Zeal for true Happiness; it dries up all that *Unction of the Holy One* diffused in the Soul; it destroys the Fear of God, and the tenderest Resentments of Piety and Devotion; and it renders all Instructions ineffectual, by putting a stop to the Practice of them. Men by this Indifference grow so exceeding remiss, that they fall off from all that Sense of Virtue, which formerly they had; they begin to question what heretofore they most firmly believed; they decline all Pains, and dread all appearance of Difficulty; they take no care to subdue themselves; but shut their Eyes against their Duty, and stifle all the Light of Grace within them. This is the Condition of the lukewarm Christian, infinitely worse than perfect Coldness and Aversion; because a Sinner may be brought to a Conviction of his Danger, but the lukewarm Professor will not be made sensible of his: And this languishing sort of Zeal, while there is Life left, is worse than an absolute Death in Trespasses and Sins. For it is Indifference, which quenches that Fervour of Zeal so absolutely necessary for waging a constant War

War with a Man's Desires, and the violent Conflicts by which Heaven is taken by force. This makes Virtue distasteful, and Vice a matter of no consequence; and lays aside those Guards and that holy Watchfulness, which the Gospel recommends as things without which Salvation is never to be attained. For since we are always in danger, and beset thick with Ambuscades of Enemies in every Step we take, there is great and indispensable occasion, for being always upon our Guard. Every thing combines against the Christian, (as * St. Leo truly observes) and the Moment he ceases to fight, he loses the Day. The Peace he makes with his Enemy is of more fatal consequence than the hottest Engagement; and when the Weather seems fair, his Danger is more than in the roughest Sea. *Have a care* (says † St. Jerom) *and abate no part of your Diligence, upon a vain presumption, that you are safe; for || a Calm to a Christian is a sort of Storm, from which few escape.* Now if he that stops in the middle of the Race; if he *that looks behind him, after he hath put his Hand to*

* Plena sunt omnia periculis, plena laqueis; invitant cupiditates, insidiantur illecebræ. *Leo Serm. 5. in Quadr.*

† Timent in sereno pati tempestatem. *Hier. l. 2. cont. Pel.*

|| Nolite esse securi: Ista tranquillitas tempestas est. *Hier. ad Hel.*

the Plough, Luke ix. 62. If he that hath begun this great Work, and slackens his Pains and Resolution, though never so little, is not thought fit for the Kingdom of God; what will become of them, who by a wretched Negligence desert the Post in which Providence hath placed them; and throw off the Engagements in which they had bound themselves? This is in effect to break in upon God's Prerogative, to invert the Order and Method of your Salvation, and declare, that you will not follow God's Way, but your own. Let us then be careful and diligent to follow him, if we desire to go right, and arrive safe at last; he is wiser than we; and knows better what Methods are proper for our Salvation, than our selves can possibly do: But let us excite in our Hearts that eager Appetite; that Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness, which our blessed Saviour prescribed to his Disciples, as a Means to quicken and sustain them in their painful Pursuits after Heaven and Happiness. Let us not, with that Disciple in the Gospel, pretend that we must first take care of Families and Concerns, before we can be at leisure to follow him. This Delay would argue but very cold Concern for Heaven. Let us remember, that he who desired this Privilege of the Son of God, was left to his own foolish Choice,
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and rejected, as a Person unqualified for his Discipleship. If we consent to put off our good Resolutions to a longer Day, the Enemy, who is always watching to destroy us, will find some opportunity to lay them quite aside. And to cure this spiritual Laziness, so exceeding dangerous to the Soul, let us hearken with Fear and Trembling to those horrible Threatnings, pronounced by the Angel against the Church of *Laodicea*, *Because thou art lukewarm*, that is neither hot nor cold, but irresolute and indifferent, *I will spue thee out of my Mouth*. So abominable is this Temper in the sight of God, who will not, cannot, without some Expressions of Indignation and Grief, endure that any Christian should be thus unconcerned. And what indeed can be more provoking, than for Men to be so absolutely void of care what becomes of them, after that God hath done so much to rescue and redeem them?

Several other Obstructions there are, easily reducible under the Heads now mentioned; such as, secret Injustice, open and avowed Oppression, Enmity and Hatred, Jealousies and Piques; Murmuring and Envy, Calumny and Censoriousness; and in a word, whatever else tends to break the Order and Peace, and dissolve the Union and Love of Christians. Nor will I particularly

ticularly insist upon the general Voluptuousness, the immoderate Love of Life, the many Vanities practised and defended in this loose Age! the Luxury and Lasciviousness, and exorbitant Ambition, of the Great! whose Heads are full of nothing else but Projects and Intrigues to settle and enjoy themselves here, without the least prospect or thought of any future State. These are in such direct opposition to Salvation, that the Sacraments and other Means of Grace which Men pretend to use, without correcting these vicious Inclinations, do but provoke God so much the more. But that which is of more dreadful Consideration than all the rest, and gave St. *Paul* all that Terror and Astonishment, which he profess'd heretofore upon the Rejection of the Jews, is this, That Jesus Christ himself, the greatest and most miraculous of all other Means ordained to this Purpose, became to that People the greatest of all Obstructions, by the extreme Blindness of their Obstinacy and Pride. For the Meanness of that Appearance he made, while conversing upon Earth, gave them so great Offence, that they rather chose to revolt from all the Declarations of the Law and Prophets concerning the Messias, than submit to the Gospel so preached: They renounced the

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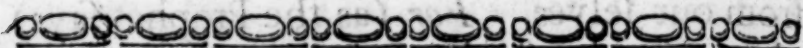
Father,

— Father, because they resolved not to believe the Son. This was what *Isaiah* had long before declared would be; *He that shall be your Sanctification, shall be also a Stone of Stumbling, and a Rock of Offence to both the Houses of Israel, and a Snare to all the Inhabitants of Jerusalem,* (Ch. viii. 14.) (*Qui erit vobis in sanctificationem. Vulg.*) Now what was thus verified in their Case, is so likewise in most
 + Accidents of human Life. There is scarce any one Dispensation of Providence, which may not be a powerful Instrument of Salvation, and yet by being abused it may be converted into as great an Obstacle against it. *David* grew better by a Crown, and *Saul* was ruined by it. The Pharisee returned from the Temple worse than he went
 — up to it, and the vile Publican came back justified to his House. These different Successes cast the Apostle into such Astonishment, to consider, how very differently God works upon the Minds of Men, by the very same Opportunities, and the same Means.

+ These are the Hindrances to our Salvation: The Cause whereof it is usual with Men to charge upon God, without considering, as they ought, that the things themselves, which are the Occasions only of Virtue and Vice, are indeed from God; but

but the abuse of these things is entirely from our selves. For (as the Prophet says) *the Hand of the Lord is not shortned, that it cannot save, nor his Ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but our Iniquities separate between us and our God, and our Sins hide his Face from us, that he will not hear: For your Hands are defiled with Blood, your Lips have spoken Lyes, and your Tongue uttered perverse things,* (Isai. lix. 1, 2, 3.) That is, his Grace is ever able and present to render all our Events of good effect to those who comply with it; but to the wicked and obstinate, he does most justly turn *what should have been for their wealth into an occasion of falling.* The following part of that Chapter in the Prophet, is an Abridgment of the several Impediments to Salvation. But, having already seen what I conceive sufficient for my present Design, let us now proceed to try if we can discover the Means most likely to contribute towards it.





C H A P. V.

The Means of Salvation, and the Use we ought to make of them.

THE Mind of Man is too narrow to comprehend by its own Strength the Way of Salvation. God alone can teach it; and he must be consulted for Directions to walk in the Way of his own appointing. His Directions, according to the Prophet's Advice, (*Isai. viii. 20.*) are to be sought only in the Laws he hath given us. Let us therefore attend to him, and to those who teach us by commission from him, without amusing our selves with the vain Reasonings of Flesh and Blood, whose Wisdom reaches no farther than to present Objects.

And, since Eternity is the Matter in hand, let us go to the *Father Everlasting*, and the Prince, of whose *Kingdom there shall be no End*. He is the Light of Life, and all other Lights lead only to Death. His Life and Death, his Doctrine and Example are the Holy Instructions, by which he gives Men *Knowledge and Salvation*. And what hath he done to this purpose? We were in Darkness, and he hath called

us into his marvellous Light. He hath created us again by Baptism to Innocence and Good Works, and Newness of Life: We were afar off, and he hath made us nigh by the Blood of the Cross; nay, all the Works of his Hands were therefore made, that they might become Instruments of Salvation. The mute Parts of the Creation yet speak of him loudly; the Heavens declare his Glory, and call upon Men to aspire to a Participation of it: And nothing upon Earth is so vile or common, but it may furnish Means of promoting our Holiness here, and Happiness hereafter.

Nature in its most silent State teaches Man distinctly what must be his End; and the very Dead preach to us our own Mortality, more powerfully than the Living can possibly do. Heaven and Earth, Sickness and Health, natural and moral Philosophy, evil Report and good Report, Riches and Poverty, our Sufferings and our Comforts, Life and Death, are ordained by Providence for means of profiting our Souls. And from all that happens, all the variety of Casualties our Condition is exposed to, from Mens Successes and Disappointments, their Friendships, their Inclinations, their Sympathies, their several Callings and Business in the World, something of Benefit may be gathered. For

there is not any of all these but hath a secret Virtue and Tendency toward that one great Ordinance of God, the Glorifying of his faithful Servants. As Men of Skill tame the most savage Beasts, to make them serviceable for their occasions, so a prudent Christian will correct the most capricious Humour, and soften the ruggedest Disposition, that it shall be gentle and tractable in the practice of Virtue. The * wise Man makes good profit of Grief, and Poverty, and Disgrace, and all the other Difficulties and Distresses of human Life ; and by the Address of Philosophy and good Management keeps himself easy in the Affairs of the World. And shall not a Christian much more, with the Assistances of divine Grace, be able to convert Sufferings and present Adversities into Instruments and Occasions of his future Happiness in Heaven ? It is in the Creator's Intention, that we should come to him by the help of the Creatures. But Sin hath so depraved the Judgment of wretched Men ; and our Enemy scatters so great a quantity of Tares among the good Seed ; and we our selves are so carried away with the Inconstancy

* Sapiienti non nocetur à paupertate non à dolore, non ab aliis vitæ tempestatibus; Bonorum rector, malorum victor; Tu illum premi putas; Malis suis utitur. *Senec. ad Lucil.*

of our Desires, and the Corruption of our Nature, that the discreet Use which ought to be made of these Means, is incumbred with almost invincible Difficulties. For, as in natural Advantages, that which is good for one Man, is stark naught for another; as strong Meats are proper for healthful Stomachs, but hurtful to tender and sickly Constitutions; and Wine, which cheers and fortifies the Healthful, weakens and overpowers the Feeble: So in moral Means, that which makes one a good Man, does but confirm and harden another in Vice. That Praise, which renders the Modest more humble, blows up the Presumptuous and Conceited with Vanity. And the same Wealth, which sanctifies the charitable Man's Plenty to him, corrupts the Covetous and Profuse. This is what we are highly concern'd to know and observe; and in this Skill of making the best of every Accident it is, *that the Children of this World are said to be wiser, in their Generation, than the Children of Light*; because they make choice of such Methods only as are proper for compassing the Ends they design them to serve. And this is the first Quality of a Means to be applied to its proper purpose.

II. A Second Quality is this, that no Means are good in themselves, or valu-

able by us, any farther than in proportion to that Virtue they have of contributing to the End for which they are employed.

+ If a Medicine conduces to the Patient's Health by its Bitterness, that Bitterness is the only Consideration which renders it eligible. The North Wind is only desirable to a Pilot, who is making Southward, by reason that cold fresh Gale favours his intended Voyage. Rain is no otherwise profitable to the dry barren Soil, than upon the account of that Moisture, which fattens and makes the Ground fruitful. This Principle rightly understood, puts a new Face upon all Nature, in the Study and Practice of Morality; and by giving a Christian other Prospects, gives him at the same time a different Spirit and Temper. Hence it is, that Contradiction and Opposition become agreeable to him, because they awaken his attention, and make him more diligent and zealous, more vigilant and circumspect in the Concerns of his Soul. This renders Humiliation desirable; because a Man by that proceeds more safely in that rough strait Way, which leads to Life. By the Force and Influence of this Persuasion it was, that *Moses* so gallantly renounced the Pleasures and Honours of *Egypt* for the Reproach of Jesus Christ; and chose rather to suffer Affliction with
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the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin and worldly Greatness for a Season, (Heb. xi. 25, 26.) Hence St. *Paul* and *Barnabas*, in their Travels through *Lycaonia*, preferred the Persecution of the People of *Lystra*, before the Sacrifices and idolatrous Honours intended them by the Priest of *Jupiter*, (Acts xiv.) This hath made so many holy Recluses chuse a private homely Cell, before the Splendor of a Court; and the Mortifications of a Devout and Penitent Life, before all the Delights of a publick and sensual one. This hath prevailed with Numbers of Persons of the best Quality, to renounce the Delicacies of the World, and embrace the Humility and Poverty of the Gospel; to deny themselves many Enjoyments, of which their Condition gave them Opportunities and Abundance; because they thought the Cross of Christ, and the Reserves of a Holy Conversation, much more safe and effectual Means of obtaining that much more valuable Prize of everlasting Salvation.

III. A Third Quality of Means is this, that they must never cease to be such, by being esteemed and sought as somewhat above the Condition of Means. This would be to pervert the proper Use of them, by fixing our Desires in them as our End; and to fall into that horrible Confusion and Disorder,

- order, which St. *Augustin* mentions, as the most general Cause of all the Extravagance and Corruption of Manners observable in the World: Which is *to use those things which were made for Enjoyment, and to enjoy those which ought to be used only* *.
- This proceeds from that depraved Self-love, by the Byass whereof a Man is drawn to value the Creature more than the Creator; and so utterly to invert that wise and proper Order, in which God established things at first. Hence the ambitious Man looks upon the Honour he is in such greedy pursuit of, as his End; in the Enjoyment of which, Happiness consists: Hence the Covetous bears greater regard to Interest than Conscience; and the voluptuous Man is more concerned for the Gratification of his Senses, than the Saving of his Soul.
- This turned an Archangel into a Devil, because Vanity and Pride made the Satisfaction he coveted; and the first Man, from being Master, became a Slave, to the Creatures, by the same Irregularity in his Affections. As a Punishment for his Folly, that haughty King of *Babylon*, who laboured to exalt himself above all that is Humane, by commanding his Statue to be honoured with

* Omnis humana perversio fructibus uti velle, & utendis frui, *Aug. l. octog. Qu. 30.*

Prostrations and Divine Worship, was thrust down to the level of the Beasts : And those Philosophers mentioned by St. *Paul* (Rom. i.) who professed and conceited themselves wise, became Fools, through the Pride and Error of their Minds. And if we do but at all reflect upon the Excellence of God, there needs but very little consideration to convince us, that preferring Interest, or Pleasure, or any other thing before him, must needs be a Breach of that Order and eternal Reason, which he hath settled in the World ; a Usurping what belongs not to us, Robbery to God and Ruin to our selves : For which reason the Scripture mentions the alienating our Affections from him under Terms of the basest and most unpardonable Unfaithfulness ; *For lo ! they that forsake thee shall perish, thou shalt destroy all them that commit Fornication against thee,* (Psalm lxxiii. 27.)

Now the Christian, whose Mind is enlightned by Faith, looks upon God alone as his ultimate End ; and upon all other Creatures, as so many Means only, or as it were Steps, by which Men make their Approaches to him. These therefore he values in a just proportion, as they conduce more or less to this End. For Faith, from whence he takes his Measures, discovers to him no Worth, or Merit, or real Good.

Goodness, in any of them, farther than they may prove Occasions of conducting him to God. And, in consequence of this Rule, he looks upon them all with equal indifference. Riches or Poverty, Honour or Contempt, Health or Sicknes, Pleasure or Pain, Advancement or Degradation, Friendship or Desertion, Parts or Slowness of Understanding, Prosperity or Disgrace, Life or Death, all are alike to him. He sees all Conditions with the same Temper; and is not by his Inclinations led to one more than another, till they come to be considered as things that have a tendency to promote the Glory of God and his own Salvation; and in the same degrees that they excel each other in this respect, they rise likewise in his esteem above the rest. He chuses or declines them, as they are capable of setting him nearer, or detaining him farther off from Heaven. He is entirely of the Traveller's mind, whose only Care is to pursue his Journey; and therefore, when he meets with several Roads, his Heart is not set upon any one more than the rest, till he be informed which of them leads to the Place whither he intends: And then he is not in any degree loth to quit the rest, how beautiful soever the Way might appear. Nothing that is temporal makes any great matter of impression upon

the Spirit of a Christian: The Evils and Sufferings he is threaten'd with from the World give him no terror, because his Hope and Expectation is fixed upon those good things only, which God promises in another World. The Glory of the next Life inspires him with Patience and Contentedness under all the Sufferings and Mortifications of the present; and with a pure and stedfast Faith, he looks up to that God, who is (as the Apostle styles him, *Heb. xiii.*) *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* He considers, that this very God will be his Recompence, and the Changes of this World, how grievous soever to Flesh and Blood, will yet be well paid with Happiness unchangeable.

Again; In the Judgment he makes concerning the Fitness and Efficacy of Means conducive to Salvation, he suffers not himself to be byass'd by the false Idea's of the Humane Understanding. For the Standard he weighs things by, is not the arbitrary and uncertain Conjectures of Man's Reasoning, but the substantial and fixt Determinations of Eternal Truth. He is indeed equally faithful in a Calm or in a Storm; Adversity cannot drive him to Despondency, nor Prosperity puff him up with Insolence and Forgetfulness of his Duty; Health makes him not presume or
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grow bold in Sin, nor does Sickness provoke him to Impatience or one murmuring Thought. But yet of the two he likes Suffering better than Pleasure, because this brings him to a greater resemblance of those Elect and Blessed Saints, (mentioned in the Revelation, Ch. xiv. 4.) *who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*, to imitate his Example. And this having been his and their Portion, the Considerate and Zealous Believer looks upon his Sufferings, as the surest and safest Way to Salvation. He knows what the Wise Man hath told us for our Comfort; that Good Men, *after having been a little chastised, shall be greatly rewarded; for God proves them*, he gives them Balm to their Wounds, and strikes that he may *find them worthy for himself*. For *he tries them as Gold in the Fire, and receives them as a Burnt-Offering*, when Tribulation hath sanctified them, (*Wisd. iii. 5, 6.*)

He is well satisfied, that all Occasions and Accidents are not of equal importance to his great Work; but he is notwithstanding exceeding cautious and watchful even in the least matters: He advances from Virtue to Virtue, and takes care to make no false Step in his Progress; for he keeps God ever in his eye, as it is reasonable he should, since God's eye is always upon him,

him, and nicely observes all his Actions. Thus, by despising the World and all it can pretend to, he arrives at the Excellence of those *of whom* the Apostle says *the World was not worthy*; greater than this whole visible Frame, the Honours and Advantages whereof are to-day mounted upon a Throne, and to-morrow tumbled into a Coffin. And thus the Contempt of earthly Enjoyments renders this Christian fit for those of Heaven.

The same Prudence, which teaches the Christian to avoid the Wandrings and Blindness of the Whore of *Babylon*, to keep close to the Strait Way of the Gospel, teaches him likewise to make just Distinctions in the Means conducing to Salvation, and to use them in such a manner as is proper for the Nature and Qualifications of each of those Means. For of these Means some do us Service, only upon condition, that we use, and enjoy and are possess'd of them; such are the Gifts of God, the Graces of his Spirit, the Instructions of his Word, the Benefit of his Sacraments. Others again do us no good, except only when we quit and disengage our selves from them; such are Honour and Riches, and Pleasure. And a third sort are of use to us no otherwise, than by the Advantages we receive from the Knowledge of them; because the
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Knowledge of these does by degrees exalt a Man higher, and bring him to the Knowledge of God. Now when the difference of these Circumstances is not duly observed, but the Order and Method of the Means perplex'd and confounded, the very best Means will lose their Efficacy, and degenerate into Impediments.

But, to be a little more particular in the direction of such Means, the best and most useful, no doubt, are those, which the Saviour of the World hath himself pointed out to us in the Gospel; such as Poverty of Spirit, Humiliation, Suffering, Simplicity, Silence, Teachableness, Patience, Prayer, and the like. And all these Ways to Heaven are the safer, in proportion as they are retired, and less exposed to view. For by this means Men are under covert from Temptations, and not so apt to be interrupted or opposed in their Passage to Almighty God. But the surest Course of all is to live up to the Perfection of our particular Profession and Business, and to do our Duty in that State of Life unto which it hath pleased God to call us. For he is not confined, but hath great variety of Ways for bringing us to himself. We need only follow him, for he will chuse for us. And what particular Condition of Life soever his Providence hath appointed us to,

to, for fulfilling the Duties of that Condition we are particularly accountable, and ought to look upon that, as the Way he designs to leads us to Heaven by. When Mens Ambition renders them uneasy, and fond of Change for Interest or Honour; or when the Inconstancy of their Humour will fix to nothing, this is a Fault, and a Refusing to follow God in the Methods of his Providence. 'Tis in this spiritual, as in common Engagements, he that would be victorious over his Enemy, must fight in Rank and File, and discharge his proper Post. And to be ever shifting and restless, is to desert in effect, and by stragling from the place our Commander hath assigned, to usurp his Right, and turn our own Carvers. And, considering the fickle and busy Minds of Christians, who, instead of adorning their own Province, are eternally grasping at something more and higher; I tremble to think what a wretched Account the generality of People will be able to give of this Article at the last great Reckoning. Especially, when I find St. *Paul* exhorting Christians to so perfect a Resignation to the Disposals of Providence in these Matters, that he advises even those who were Slaves, not to care for or covet Freedom; and only to use it rather, if it were offered them, (1 *Cor.* vii.) And this for a

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very good reason, because the Servant of Men is nevertheless Christ's Freeman; and therefore they might very contentedly abide in the meanest Calling, since every Station and Calling is equally a Method made use of by God to save the Souls of Men. For this requires no extraordinary and uncommon Courses to be taken, but is effected equally in any, provided they are suitable to the Will of God. If then you are involved in Business and Worldly Concerns, do not imagine, that you are presently to throw off all these Cares; no: The Duty God expects from you in such a Case, is, that you should live in the World as becomes a Christian, that you should make a good Improvement of the Talent committed to your Charge; that you should practise and be fruitful in good Works, that you should forgive Injuries, love your Enemies, distribute to the Poor out of the Increase God gives you, and use your Authority and Interest to protect the Oppressed, and help them to right who suffer wrong; that you should be frequent in Prayer and holy Exercise; attend constantly upon the Sacraments and other Ordinances of Religion, and so pursue the Affairs of the World, as to shew, that seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness is your first and chief Care.

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But after all, nothing will more prevail for procuring us Favour and good Acceptance with our great Judge in the Day of his fierce Anger, than taking the Balance into our own Hand, by frequent Examination, and Judging of our own selves. For this Judgment, well performed by our own Consciences in the mean while, will shelter us from the Terrors of that dreadful Account, in which God will exercise his Justice and Severity hereafter. In short, the Necessities and Cares, which our worldly Circumstances engage us in, the Infirmities which beset us on every side, the Miseries which hang about us, the Imperfections we are subject to, and all the Troubles that oppress us, when submitted to with Patience, are very powerful Means of qualifying us for Heaven; which after all is appointed for a Reward to Stedfastness and Perseverance in Goodness. For *he, that endureth to the End*, (says our blessed Lord) *the same*, and no other, *shall be saved*, (Matth. x. 22.) It is by *seeking* diligently, and by continuing *knocking*, that Men obtain what *they ask*, (Matth. vii. 7.) The different Circumstances of human Life, Disgrace or Reputation, Disappointment or Success, Health or Sicknes, Prosperity or Adversity, Joy or Grief, and the several Duties incumbent upon each Capacity, are all use-
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ful, and will not fail to turn to good account at last, provided Men take due care to manage them well and wisely. The only danger is, the being mistaken in this important Point. And it is a Matter of very fatal consequence, either to make a wrong choice, or an ill use, of the several Expedients, which the Providence of God puts into our hands, in order to the furthering that one needful, that one great Work of our Everlasting Salvation.

Let us but consider these important Truths with a true Christian Spirit, and we shall find no great difficulty in being persuaded of them. Let us set out with hearty and zealous Desires of carrying our main Point; for without this good beginning all other Means will prove of no effect. The Answer *Thomas Aquinas* made to his Sister, when she begged his Directions what she must do to be saved, was this, *that she must desire and intend well.* The grand Secret lies in this, all the rest will be easy to a Man whose Heart is once inflamed with this Desire. *If your Wishes are eager and fervent, says St. Paulinus*, you will find the Way short and smooth; but it will be rough and tedious, if your*

* Si desideras, Via brevis est & suavis; si negligis, longa & laboriosa. *Paulin. ad Sever.*

Desires are cold and languid. For when a Man's Mind is sincerely and earnestly bent upon Salvation, his Industry in seeking and using the Means will be proportionable. And the Negligence of Men in this respect proceeds from their Inconstancy, and shews them double-minded, that sometimes they do, and sometimes they do not, desire this great End.

From the very instant then of any one Expedient appearing proper for my Circumstances, and of consequence toward obtaining Heaven; I shall no longer continue indifferent with regard to it. I shall pursue and use it with my utmost Might, at the expence of my Pleasure, my Reputation, my Quiet, and all my other Temporal Advantages. In the choice of Means too, I shall give those the preference, which seem most safe and likely to succeed: For where so great a Concern as Eternity lies at stake, Prudence will by all means advise, that I should use my utmost Diligence to secure it. Thus I shall walk in the strait Way of the Gospel, without turning to the Right Hand or to the Left; I shall renounce even my most lawful Appetites, where they are like to prove a hindrance to me: I shall break through all those Bonds of Self-love, which prepossess, and render me partial, in my own favour; I shall retrench every Irregularity

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regularity in my Affections; and, according to that Advice in the Gospel, be content to *pluck out my right Eye, and cut off my right Hand, if they happen to offend me*. Every Step I advance in the Way of God, will be supported and confirmed by the purest Sentiments of that Christian Humility, which alone is the sure Foundation of solid Piety; because this alone can dispose the Mind to desire and receive that Light of Holy Instruction entire, and without prejudice; and inspire that meek, and teachable Temper, which the Holy Spirit requires, as a necessary Preparation for the Influences of his Grace. And upon all occasions I shall incline to Submission, and Simplicity, and Patience, to *wait for the Salvation of the Lord quietly*, as the Prophet hath advised, (*Lam. iii. 26.*) That Suffering, which gives a Lustre to Virtue, and that Mortifying of the Body, whereby the Soul receives new Life, will be my faithful and inseparable Companions; and Prayer, which strengthens the Weak, by sustaining the Spirit of Man with Recruits from the Spirit of God, shall be my daily and delightful Food.

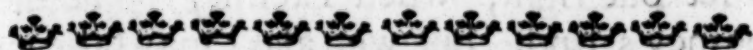
In a word: In order to bring forth Fruit unto Life Eternal, and attain the exceeding great and precious Promises of the new Covenant, I shall unite my self to Jesus Christ,

Christ, as the Branch is joined to the Stock of the Tree. For the Heart of a Christian resembles that Vine described by our blessed Saviour, which becomes dry and barren, from the Moment it is separated from the Root, and ceases to receive the refreshing Moisture, that descends from Heaven; the constant Waterings of Divine Grace. But, *O my God*, make me, I beseech thee, + duly sensible, that a Desire of being saved includes a Desire of, or at least a being Content at the same time with Humiliations, taking up the Cross, and all those Sufferings of which that Salvation is appointed the glorious Recompence. For, if it was necessary that thy eternal Son should first suffer many bitter Things, and so enter into his Glory, even that Glory which was his own essential Inheritance; what Title can I have to any part of it, without a part in what he underwent? Fill then my Heart with these important Truths. Give me a saving Fear of thy Justice, and a holy Dread of thy Judgments, that I may constantly proceed with that Reverence, and Watchfulness, and great Caution, which are necessary to preserve a Christian in due Fidelity and unshaken Perseverance. Imprint in deep and lasting Characters, that Oracle of thy Eternal Wisdom, and fix upon my Heart those weighty Words,

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which are the Sum of all Knowledge, and the true Christian Philosophy, *What shall it profit a Man, if he gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul, or what shall a Man give in exchange for his Soul?* (Matth. xvi. 26.) How wretched a Bargain would it prove in the End to possess the transitory and perishing Riches of Earth, and to lose the everlasting and unconceivable Treasures of Heaven? To be happy for a Moment, and exquisitely miserable to all Eternity? Ah! Do we at all consider this? Let us at least begin to do so in time. Do we govern our Affections, and by this Rule proportion our Esteem and our Content, our Love and our Hatred, and all the other Dispositions of our Souls? Do we manage our Conversation, and proceed in each Action of our Lives upon this great, this necessary Principle? Do we make choice of the properest, the safest Methods for this Salvation with all that Prudence which Faith would inspire? Do we indeed walk in the Paths of Truth and Virtue, with all that watchful Care, and serious Application, which is the Guard against Surprize, and a Shield against all that vast Variety of Accidents without, and Infirmities within, to which our present feeble and unsettled Condition stands exposed? If we are got thus far, then it will be time to acquaint ourselves

selves with those Errors and false Measures, which may be apt to misguide us, and hazard the Success even of our best Intentions.



C H A P. VI.

*Mistakes and False Measures in the Way
of Salvation.*

THE Way to Heaven is so very difficult, the Obstructions that divert us from, or hinder our Progress in it, so great; the Snares and Precipices that surround it on every side, so many; the Ground on which we tread, so rough; the Path so strait, so slippery; the Conflicts to be undergone come on so thick; the Spirit is so weak, and the Flesh so exceeding frail; that a Man can hardly be cautious enough against so manifold a Danger. Now the first Branch of this Caution we shall do well to employ in observing the False and By-roads, which we may meet with in our Travels; that, being thus fore-warned, we may avoid going wrong, where every such Error is of fatal consequence. And here we must by no means depend upon our own Strength and Judgment; since our Heart, our Understanding,

derstanding, and all the Advantages of human Reason, will prove incompetent and deceitful Guides, to us, if not assisted by some better Light. Let us then be careful to set out right, when Eternity is at the Journey's End. But we, alas! may take up the Prophet's Lamentation, (*Isai. liii.*) *All we, like Sheep, have gone astray, we have turn'd every one to his own way*; walking in the Delights of our Heart, complying with the Vanity of our own Humours, and Desires, and Passions, and vehement Transports, and other Follies and Exorbitancies of Life: Some whereof, the most necessary to be avoided in the Concern now before us, I design here to take particular notice of.

- I. The First and most Usual seems to be, — a loose and general Desire to be saved, without descending so far as the particular Means appointed for that Purpose. We make to our Journey's End, and are eager to come thither, without considering the Way that leads to it; we desire the Port, but think not of the Sea, nor provide against the Storms in the Voyage to it; we pretend to the promised Land, without going through the Wilderness; grasp at the Prize, but decline the Combat; and, like the Sons of *Zebedee*, are fond of our Lord's Kingdom, but overlook his Cup. There are

are but few Men, who upon diligent Examination will not find this to be their own Case. Every body would go to Heaven, but few are for taking up the Cross, and following Christ. Thus we deceive ourselves with a false Imagination of Zeal, and holy Desire; which in truth is no Desire, without taking the Methods proper for its accomplishment. For the Conduct of our Lives is the only Proof of the Sincerity of our Hearts. Thus many People pretend to Devotion, without the least Principle of it; they sequester themselves to God, and yet retain irregular Affections; they put the Cheat upon their own Consciences, and sooth themselves up with empty Idea's, but have no part of the Substance of Virtue; and laying great stress upon this Phantom, they live and die in this wretched imperfect Condition; and have nothing more to shew for their Salvation, than this poor, loose, and general Desire of it. The Fate whereof at last will prove like that of *Job*, when the Desires of his Soul were as the Wind, and his *Welfare passed away as the light Cloud*, Chap. xxx.

II. The Second Error is greater than the First. For Men do not only indulge and satisfy themselves with this general Desire of Happiness, but they go out of the right Way to seek for Means of obtaining it. And
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the Pains they take, as well as the Means they pitch upon, are deceitful, because their Choice proceeds upon impure Prospects, and upon carnal and selfish Principles. And, thus the more they are mistaken in the Way they chuse, the farther they stray from the right and ready Path. The former Error was an Error of the Understanding only, but the second is an Error of the Heart and the Affections. For Men draw to themselves a Scheme of Salvation, such as is peculiar and agreeable to their own Fancy; they make Principles of Religion as they think; determine Virtue and Vice by their own Likings and Dislikes; and are for a flexible and debonnair Director, who will himself submit to be directed. Thus the main Point to be secured being the gratifying their own Inclinations, they chuse their State of living purely upon their own heads, without consulting with God, or examining their own Abilities, or at all regarding the Reason of the Thing and Suitableness of the Undertaking. So that the Considerations which cast the Balance, are oftentimes no other, than those of Birth, and Quality, and Education: In short, Men fix sometimes by meer Chance and without thinking at all, and generally upon no higher Motives, than those of Gain, and raising Fortunes, and securing Settlements,

and the like. A Man engages in an Office, or grasps at a Preferment, or marries a Wife, without ever regarding how consistent this is with the Duty God requires from him: And how can we think it strange, that Men, who govern their Actions at this rate, should meet with so many Disappointments, and be plagued with real Evils in those Engagements, from whence their false Calculations proposed and promised such abundance of Good? Now this Practice of consulting our own Inclination and Temper in the most important Concerns of this Life, is yet more usual, and more fatal too, in that great Affair of Salvation. The Miser will be content to give all in exchange for Heaven, except his Money: The sordid Man expects to be saved by Frugality, and the melancholy by Sourness of Humour and an Austere Conversation. The Pharisees were proud and superstitious, therefore they never troubled themselves with any such unpalatable Conditions, as Humility and Meekness; but chose rather to go to Heaven by Fasting twice a Week. There are a great many Men that mortify in several Particulars, and yet all the while follow their own Inclination: They assert their Freedom by disengaging from all outward Objects, and yet are Slaves to their own Humour still.

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— They renounce the World, but not themselves; keep those Commandments which are easy and convenient for them, and make no bones of breaking all the rest: In short, they submit, and are regular, just where they have a mind to it, and no further. They would not for the World wrong their Neighbour in his Person or Estate, but they never scruple to murder his Reputation, and take away his good Name. They make a conscience of Fasting, and Praying, and being, what they call, good Church-people; but they make none at all of paying their Debts. In short, they obey nothing but their own Humour, in a Matter, where the Chief Thing required of them is to cross and subdue their own Humour. And the Way they mark out for Heaven, is no other than the Way of their own Heart, without ever troubling themselves to consider, what it is that Faith hath revealed, or Almighty God prescribed in the Case.

III. The Third is infinitely worse than both the former; by reason of that mean and contemptuous Notion, which it manifestly betrays, concerning the Real Value of Salvation; and the Ignorance Men live in of the mighty consequence of it to them. For People reckon Heaven so despicable a Matter, that, it seems, they care not how they

they live, provided they can but contrive to make a tolerable good End. A fine Lady, that calls her self Christian, after having lived all along in Profanation of her Marriage-Vow, shall imagine, that to be chaste when she comes to die is sufficient. A rich Man, that hath lock'd up his Money close in his Chest, and never suffered the Poor to be the better for him while he lived, contents himself with a charitable Bequest in his last Will; and calls that giving to pious Uses, which indeed is only parting with that which Death will not suffer him to keep any longer. An ambitious Man thinks it time to leave off his Intriguing, and renounce his Vice, when the Priest is doing his last Offices about him. And a hardened Sinner, grown old in Lewdness and Sensuality, persuades himself, that receiving the Sacrament, and a *Lord be merciful to me a Sinner*, at his last Gasps, will set all right between God and him, and secure his Soul effectually. And what a sort of Management is this? To set about the great Concern of Eternity, when Men are disabled from discharging any worldly Business? They have not Sense enough left to make a valid Will, and yet they are thought in a very good Condition to enter into Covenants, and make up the Accounts of their Souls, and dispatch the whole Affair

fair of Everlasting Salvation. As if Heaven were what Men can never be under any Incapacity of securing, though for the most frivolous Matters upon Earth they may. But are we indeed so foolish to expect, that *Grapes can be gathered of Thorns, and Figs of Thistles*? For so in effect we do, when cherishing an Hope so extravagant, as that of reaping the Fruits of eternal Life from Death and Sin, a worldly and wicked Conversation. Is it not strange, that Men should live and go on with so much Assurance, when all the while they are in manifest danger of utter Ruin? This is by no means the Spirit and Temper of the Gospel, which above all things recommends Diligence and Watchfulness, and that upon these weighty and unanswerable Reasons; because Death is ever at hand, and the Consequence of a Surprise is most dreadful; because our Religion professes it self to be a State of spiritual Warfare, and our Life a Combat, without any intermission: So that Heaven can never be attained, except by committing Violence upon our selves. And can we think it reasonable, that that Salvation which hath already cost the Son of God so very dear, should cost us, who hope to reap the Profit of his Sufferings, nothing at all?

IV. The Fourth dangerous Seducement is that Spirit of Presumption and spiritual Pride, of which St. *Augustin* declares, that it separated him from God, and blinded his Eyes to such a degree, as disabled him from discerning the Truth. Hence Men measure all that hath any tendency to Salvation by their own false and feeble Idea's: They had rather follow their own Notions, and rely upon private Judgment, than submit to the Authority of those Guides, whom Providence hath set over them: They make much reckoning of their own Deserts, and place greater Confidence in them, than in the Mercies of God. The Foundations they build on, are the particular sort of Life they lead, the Profession they are of, the Convent, or Habit, by which they are distinguished, the Holiness of the Place where they dwell, the Virtues of the Company they keep, and the Sanctity of them with whom they communicate in the Worship of God. *I am a Monk*, says one, and *I a Hermit*, says another; and *I converse with none but good Men*, boasts a third; and *I have a great Inclination to Prayer*, and *am very tenderly affected when at my Devotions*; or *My Intentions are all upright and pure*, and *my Zeal for God's Glory fervent*; and the like. Now all this is the most extravagant that can be.

And if we will refer ourselves to St. *Augustin's* Judgment in the Case, such Reasonings are no better than idle Delusions.

+ *It is not* (says he) *the Place, but the Practice, which makes the Man good; an Angel sinned in Heaven, Adam fell in Paradise; and where could there be greater Advantages of Holiness, than here**? How ridiculous is it to depend upon the Piety of our Neighbours and Acquaintance, when even the Conversation of the Saviour of the World was not a Preservative sufficient for *Judas*? And what does a Profession, or a Form of Holiness signify, to them, whose Good Works are not suitable to what those Circumstances require? Let us not then vaunt with that Church of *Laodicea* (Rev. iii.) *Behold I am rich, and have need of nothing*, when all the while we are *miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*; void of all Merit that might justify this Confidence, and ready to fall into the grossest Enormities, the moment God leaves us to ourselves. Let us beware of laying too great stress upon that affectionate Zeal we feel in our Devotions; for this is not always the Effect of

* *Locus non facit sanctos, sed operatio bona. Peccavit Angelus in Cœlo, peccavit Adam in Paradiso. Quis locus sanctior? Aug. Serm. 37. ad frat. Erem.*

Piety, but very often of Temper and particular Constitution. *Not every one* (saith the blessed Jesus, *Matth. vii. 21.*) *that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven:* For this Kingdom consists not in Words, but in Actions. Let us not observe so much what we have done already, as what we have still to do. A Traveller, that would take up with the Satisfaction of the Way he had gone, without considering how far he hath yet to go, is not like to make any great progress in his Journey. The having made the best of his way hitherto, will be of little service; it is the reaching that Place whither he is bound at last, which must set him at rest. Thus did St. *Paul*, who look'd upon his whole Life, as a Race — without any intermission, and a Combat, — wherein he must never cease from fighting. The Irons he was loaden with, the Scars he bore about him, the Persecutions with which he was so severely exercised, did not exalt his Mind, or dispose him to a secure Temper; he was ever looking forward to future Sufferings; and made no other use of the Advances then past, but by them to encourage himself with hopes of like Success in those which were to come. *I follow after*, (says he) *and press on, if by any means I may attain*, *Phil. iii.* Thus he advises the *Corinthians*, (*1 Ep. ix.*) *so to run, that they may*

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may obtain. For the true Christian (according to St. *Bernard's* Remark, *Ep.* 252.) sets no Bounds to his Virtue, nor ever thinks he hath done enough. He never stands still, but sees much more to be done, than is done. He thirsts continually after higher Perfections, whereas the presumptuous Man is perfectly content with himself, and in this supposed Safety lies his greatest Danger.

V. A Fifth Seducement is the Contempt of those we live among: This is the Product of the former; for presuming highly of our selves puts us upon making Comparisons, and in those Comparisons it is easy to foresee, on which side the Favour and Preference will fall. This was the Pharisee's Error in the Parable, who immediately fell to thanking God, *that he was not as other Men are*, Luke xviii. And the reason why he thought himself a Man of more nice and scrupulous Honesty than any of his Neighbours, was, that he saw all their Faults, but none of his own. Thus the Presumptuous always divides unequally: He is sure ever to reserve the greatest Share for his own Use, to value, and to love himself, above all Mankind besides. For he looks upon himself in the best, and upon his Neighbours in the worst Light. He hath a distinct View of their Imperfections, without dis-

discerning any of their Virtues; and he sees nothing but Virtue at home, without perceiving any Failing there. The Vices of others he does not only cull out, but aggravate and magnify; but for his own (if any such he acknowledges) he turns the other End of the Perspective, and represents the bulkiest and most deformed of them all exceeding little; and such as are scarce distinguishable. Hence it is, that there is scarce any body so disorderly and extravagant, but he reckons himself more regular than his Neighbour. And let him be never so much out of the way, still no body is so right as he is in his own eyes; because Men are least acquainted with their own State, and will not be brought to judge impartially concerning it.

VI. The sixth goes further yet. For by + this unjust Preference of ourselves, we come to affect new Ways of our own; fly off — from the Opinions and Practices of those we despise, think it beneath our Wisdom — and exalted Virtue to keep the common Road; abound in our own Sense; and, — instead of adhering and submitting to them, who speak to us from God, consult no Oracle but that of private Judgment. No Notions then are grateful, none of any value, but our own; and we continue inflexibly deaf to every thing, except our own Reason or

Prejudices. We usurp an Authority of calling every thing into question ; bring it before us, try and sentence it at the Bar of our own Opinion ; and so become as false and as peremptory in our Decisions, as we are insolent and unjust in pretending a Right of judging what does not properly come within our Commission to judge. The true Believer does not proceed at this rate : He consults God in all he does ; the Gospel is his Standard, and he presumes not to take one Step, without the Direction of this faithful Guide. An Instance of this Humility we have in *St. Paul* ; who, though enlightened by immediate Revelation, yet went up to *Jerusalem*, to consult with *St. Peter*, and others of Reputation in the Church, *lest* (as himself says, *Gal. ii. 2.*) *by any means he should run, or had run in vain.* Nothing is of greater consequence to a Christian, than this Modesty and Distrust of one's own Determination in nice and difficult Cases. The want of it is chargeable with all the Heresies, that have infested the Church. For, when once a Man forsakes the old beaten Track, to find out new By-paths of his own devising, that Submission is lost, which Pride casts off as an unsupportable Yoke. God hath nowhere promised the same Assistances to every private Man, which the Church in general have

have reason to expect from him: And if any Irregularity happen in that mystical Body, this will not be sufficient Warrant to rend it, and destroy its Unity by petulant Separations. For the Evil of Schism, generally speaking, is of more formidable Consequence, than that which Men run away from; and Division is more apt to create or heighten the Disease, than it is to cure it.

VII. A seventh and higher Step yet is, a Spirit of Curiosity, which cannot but be wrong in all its Measures, because it entertains no Notions above the Objects of Sense and Things of this World. These Men will dispute you World without end, concerning a future State: They examine every Article of Religion, with the utmost Severity and Insolence of Criticks: They will needs discover what God hath thought fit to hide, and undertake to know what they ought to remain in contented Ignorance of. They hearken with too great Deference to their own supposed wise Reflections; and, in that Clearing of Points which they require, refuse with a becoming Humility to submit their own imperfect Reasonings to the Wisdom and eternal Reason of Almighty God. Thus frequently falling into the Fault of that Apostle, who, overborn by a Spirit of Contradiction and Unbelief, presumed to impose Conditions upon him, to whose Authority

thority he owed Submission. *Except I shall see in his Hands the Print of the Nails, and put my Finger into the Print of the Nails, and thrust my Hand into his Side, I will not believe*; John xx. 25.

Such is that presumptuous Boldness Men affect, when they would quench the purer Light of Faith; for when once Men are full of themselves, and lean too much to their own Understandings, nothing ever satisfies them; nay, they start new Opinions in the Scruples and curious Enquiries indulged by them; * new Ways and Methods, new Directors and Reasonings, and somewhat out of the common Road is ever aimed at, because old and vulgar Truths and Solutions of Difficulties are grown into Contempt. Men are greedy to fill their Heads with Novelty and Notions, which contribute more to perplex the Mind, than to advance or heal the Understanding: They seek not so much for Instruction as for Delight and Entertainment in their Studies; and an Error fresh out of the Mint hath the advantage of a stale Truth; as if this were the worse for wearing, or it were an Excellence to think differently from those that went before us. We pretend to seek the same

* Si ad Veritatem redire cupis, non est necesse viam quarere novam. Bern. de Grad. Humil.

Thing and to go the same Way with our Ancestors, but yet we are beating out new Tracks in it. But the Prophets's Advice was otherwise; *Stand ye in the Ways* (says he) *and see; and ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your Souls,* (Jer. vi. 16.) 'Tis the Temper of the World, and the particular Character of the Age we live in, to love Novelty, and to reason eternally upon Matters above our Reason. The truth is, we are too nice Philosophers, and + too little Christians.

VIII. The eighth is a Dislike of the Truth, which naturally proceeds from that vain Curiosity I have been speaking of. Men are not ignorant of their Duty, but they are not in love with what they know: The small remains of Faith, which enlighten the Understanding, are not strong and bright enough to warm their Affections. We speak admirably well of God and Religion, without being at all moved with what we say. That which recommends Piety to our esteem, is the Noise it makes, the Credit it procures, and not the inward Graces which edify us. The Cause of this Irregularity I take to be the loving our selves more than Truth. By this most terrible Seducement it is, that we believe the History and Doctrine of Jesus Christ, without believing the
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the Rules of Morality he hath left us ; we can persuade our selves of the sublimest Myſteries of Faith, but not of the moſt expreſs Maxims in Practice. We make no queſtion of the Son of God's taking our Fleſh upon him, but we cannot ſubmit to the Engagements this lays us under, of imitating his unſpeakable Humility and Condeſcenſion. We ſubmit to all thoſe Wonders in the Trinity of Perſons in the Unity of the Godhead, which are beyond our Comprehenſion ; but we can by no means underſtand, that Greatneſs and Wealth are Hindrances to our Souls future Happineſs. And what a Madneſs is this ? to imagine that a bare Acknowledgment of the Myſteries of Religion can be ſufficient, without producing any Teſtimonies of our Faith ; and to lead the Life of Libertines and Heathens, under the Profeſſion of ſuch pure and holy Principles, as thoſe of a Chriſtian are. For certainly a Man ought ſo to believe the Goſpel, as not to think himſelf at liberty not to praſtiſe it. But they who do otherwiſe, are let into this Error from the Oppoſition between the Affections and the Underſtanding. That which is evident to the Judgment, makes no ſenſible Impreſſion upon the Heart. And this Misfortune is a Step towards that which I am about to mention next,

IX. Which is, ninthly, an universal Disrelish for Piety and spiritual Matters. There are abundance of Persons, who, though they lead not vicious Lives, are yet in the certain and ready Road to Damnation. They are not void of Desire and Inclination to be saved; but they are so given up to a trifling Temper, that they live without Thought, and never employ themselves in any substantial Business. Their Minds are too airy and roving, to consider seriously, and to set heartily about those things which are necessary to be done in order to Salvation: Nay, they do many things that are essential and necessary, but they do them without due Consideration. They frequent the Prayers of the Church daily, they receive the Sacrament monthly, they attend upon Sermons as they have opportunity; but still they bring a worldly Mind to Church and Communion-table, and this makes them discharge such Duties without any effectual Impression. And, though their Behaviour have nothing in it, that is scandalous and very bad, yet neither hath it any thing good; nor do they work out their Salvation, because they are not stayed enough to submit to think or work at all. Plays and the Park, Diversion and Mirth, pleasant Company, and an entertaining Book, are usually the things that

that take up all their Time. Thus their whole Life runs off in unprofitable Trifles, in Negligence and Thoughtlessness; and how free soever it may be from the Reproach of Men, yet it must needs be highly blameable with God: Because they perfectly lose the End of Living; and spend that Life in Idleness and Pleasure, which was designed for a constant and laborious Exercise of their Virtue, and a painful perpetual Combat for the obtaining that Crown, which is given to none, but them who strive lawfully, and persevere, and are victorious over their spiritual Enemies.

— This want of Regard for their Salvation, brings such Men by degrees to a Spirit of Lukewarmness and Indifference in the Use of the holiest Things. This renders all they do of no effect for obtaining Heaven, and they are ruined, perfectly for want of Concern whether they be saved or not. This is the Condition of most People of Quality: Even those among them that live regularly and free from Debauchery, yet live carelessly, and without any visible regard for a future State. They are addicted to Vanity, and resolve to make Religion bend to their Humour: They damn themselves by labouring to model the Gospel after their own Way, and to reconcile the holy Rules there, with the corrupt

rupt Principles and Modes of the Age. And what can be expected from a Proceeding so full of Contradiction, but that Confusion threatned by the Prophet (*Isai. xiii.*) to those who look sometimes upward to Heaven, and sometimes down to the Earth; and would fain join God and the World together; *even Trouble and Darknes, and Dimness of Anguish, and being driven still to greater Darknes.*

X. The tenth Error, which usually follows after those already treated of, is a beginning to doubt of Things Men have formerly believed; and a sort of tottering Faith, which boggles and raises Scruples concerning the most established Truths of Religion. The Heart becomes gross and carnal, and nothing but Darknes and Perplexity presents it self to the Understanding. Men now cease to observe the Hand of God in the several Occurrences of human Life; they look no higher than themselves; they enjoy Prosperity, and undergo Adversity, without considering by whose appointment they come upon them. Thus they never trace the good and evil Accidents back to their true original Cause; which makes it difficult for them to discern and acknowledge that Almighty Hand, which keeps it self out of sight in the most wonderful Dispensations toward Mankind, that
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it may leave room for the Exercise of a Christian's Faith. Sometimes indeed Men wilfully shut their Eyes, and will not see the Author of those things that happen to them : For it is God, who by the Bitterness of Affliction teaches Man that Wisdom, which the Sweets of Prosperity dispose him either not to attend to at all, or very quickly to forget. So that our God is equally to be praised and adored, when he wounds, as when he heals. Because every sort of Events is ordained by him for the eternal Advantage of his faithful Servants. From questioning the Providence of God, Men come by degrees to doubt his Justice. And, not content to settle their Faith upon stated and ordinary Methods, they require Miracles to build their Hopes upon : Thus imitating that extravagant Zeal of the rich Man in Torments, (*Luke* xvi.) who desired a Message from the Dead for the Conversion of his Brethren. They expect that God should be still more clear and express, in the Revelations of himself, and the Way to Heaven. I know not (say they) what he would have me do; God hath never declared himself to me in particular. How Man ! not declared himself ! Why, every Creature is thy Monitor ; and he speaks to thee in all thou seest and feelest. These are his Voice, and a loud one it is, to all who

who are disposed to hear and be awakened by it. If you attend not to him speaking in the Scriptures, in the Creation, in the Works of Providence, neither would you hearken to purpose, though he should condescend to speak immediately from Heaven. Particular Revelations are liable to the same Objections and Disappointments, with those that are general. And if you make no Improvement of those Advantages, which Reason and Faith have given you already, neither would you grow better by any of those imaginary Helps, which you fondly propose for your more effectual Conviction.

XI. The eleventh is Distrust and Discouragement in Religion, the natural Consequence of Doubt and Scruple; a Temper like those Disciples, who upon our Lord's Death laid aside their Hopes that *it was he, who should have redeemed Israel*, (Luke xxiv.) Faith is a Christian's proper Strength; and when this languishes, Hope decays and dies, and every thing appears difficult and insupportable. For the Mind, being no longer sustained with the Prospect of future Good, falters and droops. The Way of Virtue seems frightful, the least Hardships beat a Man back again; that which was once a Motive turns to a Terror; and his Salvation is thought impossible, because
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he sees his Duty only on the dark, and difficult side; and falls insensibly into a Horror and Aversion for all spiritual Things. This is an Error very common among Persons deeply engaged in the Business of the World: They form to themselves very terrible Idea's of Religion, and the Difficulties attending it, from a false Notion they have entertained of Christian Perfection. Religion indeed is difficult, and a very formidable Undertaking to some Persons; but then it is to such only as want a vigorous Faith, and such a Persuasion of future Rewards, as should enable them to persevere in it. For Hope, which is the Anchor and Support of Christians, must needs grow weaker, in proportion as Faith abates. And in regard this Want of Faith disposes Men to look upon the good Things of the present Life under the Quality of real and lasting Good; and upon the Happiness of another State, as a Good in Imagination and Expectation only: it is not to be wondred, that Men thus prepossess'd, cannot prevail with themselves to part with the perishing Riches of this World, in exchange for the incorruptible Treasures of the next. From this false mis-grounded Wisdom, Men resolve to hold fast what they are possess'd of in present; and think themselves no longer *Strangers and Pilgrims,*

grims, but Citizens and settled Inhabitants, upon Earth. For the Insensibility and Disrelish of Heavenly Things, naturally produces an inordinate Love of the World.

XII. And that is the twelfth dangerous Error, which *St. Gregory* takes notice of *, as consisting in an irregular Fondness for our own Persons and present State. Men think of nothing but living on ; and all the Care and Thought they are capable of, is employed on this purpose. They are always casting about what may conduce most to their Health ; and the Mind is entirely taken up in the Preservation of this Body, which, if they could prevent it, should never die or decay. To this we owe that general Neglect of those Austerities and necessary Mortifications, which Religion enjoins. Fastings and Prayers are sparingly used ; the Tendernefs Men express for their Bodies, and the Cruelties they are guilty of to their Souls, are both alike unconceivable. We use wonderful Precaution for an ill State of Health, or a weak Constitution ; but the Diseases and Wounds of our Consciences we take no care to heal. And the

* *Reproborum mens erga dies vitæ præsentis tanto amore constringitur, ut sic semper appetant vivere, quatenus si valeant, vivendi cursum nunquam desiderent finire. L. 18. Mor. c. 17.*

— false and sensual Love of our selves, which is our governing Principle, makes us consider every thing with regard only to our Persons ; and to chuse or refuse it, as it may contribute to our Strength, our Beauty, our Pleasure, or Preservation of the outward Man in good Case. Thus we fancy we shall never die, by declining to think of, and to provide for, Death. We hope to live for ever, and from thence accustom our selves to think we shall do so in good earnest. The People of this Temper look upon Time, which is perpetually in motion, as a stable thing, which will always abide with them ; and imagine their short Continuance in this World to be a lasting and unalterable Settlement. They think they are cut out for a longer Stage of Life than others ; measuring their Probabilities of fulfilling it, by no other Rule than that of their own Desires ; and this extended Line of Life they stretch to a sort of Immortality ; thus dreaming of wild Chimæra's, and living as if they were never to die. For all Reflections of Death they put far from them, as Thoughts uneasy and interrupting to their Enjoyments ; and so give themselves no manner of trouble in providing for that terrible Change, upon which their eternal Concerns must be determined. In short, all the Industry and Application of these
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Persons aims at nothing else but the securing and prolonging their abode here below. And we see them grow old in Business and Care, without any Fear so great, as that their Hands should not be full, and lest any Interval of Leisure should leave their Thoughts at liberty to be employed about dying. They forget their true Native Country, that they may find Opportunities of lengthening their Exile in a foreign one. And, by being over solicitous for a temporal Life, they lose the inestimable Jewel of an eternal one. But Woe be to this fatal Seducement! for Christ hath told us in the Gospel, that *he who loves his Life* above his Duty, *shall certainly lose it.* This unhappy Mismanagement necessarily exposes Men to dying unprepared; for how can he but be surprized, who never thinks of dying, and is sure to be snatched out of the World sooner than he expected? And how should they make any tolerable Provision for this most important Change, who either banish all Considerations of it from their Minds, and die as insensible of their latter End as they lived; or never submit to think of it, till they are disabled from thinking at all to any purpose? This is the Case of the debauched and dissolute, hardened in Wickedness, and old in Lewdness; they have some false Appearances

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of Remorse and Penitence when they come to die, but none of those sincere Relentings, which attend upon true Repentance. The outward Marks of Grief which they express, are frequently the Effects of Fear, occasioned by the frightful Prospect of approaching Death: And if they happen to recover, those Terrors wear off with the Disease, and they are the same harden'd Wretches as before. So just reason had *St. Augustin* to say *, that a *Death-bed Repentance, it is much to be feared, is but very lame, nay a dead and ineffectual Repentance.*

XIII. This Error is pursued close by another, which is a Love of Gain, and Greatness and Splendor, to which the Fondness for our own Persons and the present Life must needs betray us. And this is the Folly of them, who will needs be more than ordinarily Religious, in hopes of getting Reputation or Preferment by it. In which they resemble the Sons of *Zebedee*, who propos'd to themselves Honour and Advancement by becoming the Disciples of *Jesus Christ*. Their Heads were full of carnal Notions, and they were content to follow the Saviour of the World, provided they

* In infirmo infirma est Pœnitentia, & in moribundo timeo ut ipsa moriatur. *Ser. de Temp.*

might sit on his Right-hand and on his Left in his Kingdom. Their Mother too, as St. *Jerom* observes*, with an Eagerness natural to that Sex, earnestly requested a present Benefit for them, without considering or looking forward to what would be hereafter. But what was our Master's Reply? *Ye know not what ye ask.* You talk of Thrones and Kingdoms, but how improperly, to me, who propose nothing else to my Disciples, but Sufferings, and Self-denial, taking up the Cross, and laying down their Lives, when God and Duty require it? Is this a Time to think of being great, when I your Lord debase, and empty, and make my self so little? The Severity of the Reproof shews the Greatness of their Error; and how exorbitant a Desire those Men cherish, who, like them, set their Hearts upon the World, and are eager and intent upon earthly Greatness, when all the while they profess a Religion, which teaches them to aspire after no Greatness, no Promotion, but in Heaven only. The People of the Jews, who are stiled in the Gospel, *the Children of the Kingdom*, were yet cast out by their

* Mulier aviditate feminea presentia cupit, immemor futurorum. L. 3. *Com. in Matth.*

Father, because being filled with the Spirit of this World, they formed to themselves a Messiah, upon the Model of their own Vanity, and made him great after the Manner and Pomp of this present State of Things. And, in truth, nothing can be more directly opposite to the Temper of a Christian, than Ambition and Covetousness, in a Religion, whose main Design it is to inculcate Humility and Contempt of the World. These Designs of raising Fortunes and Families are usually the Bane of Souls; the Splendor of the Great blinds their Judgments, or debauches their Principles. But, if such have any Faith or Religion left, let them consider the Height of their Station with Fear and Trembling, remembering what Engagements this lays upon them. For there is nothing so easy as to abuse Plenty and Greatness; nor any thing more difficult, than to satisfy in all Points those several Duties and Opportunities of doing Good, which such a Condition requires and furnishes Men with.

Lastly, The Misery and very Extremity of Error, is when Men make * that Error a Matter of Pride to themselves, and even

* Tanta est Cæcitas hominum de cæcitate gloriantium.
August. Conf. l. 3. c. 3.

glory in their Folly and Blindness. They take a pleasure in going astray, because their Heart is vitiated, and there is no Light left in their Understandings. This is very usual with Men who suffer themselves to be imposed upon by the glittering Appearances of temporal Advantages. They run, like Lovers in distraction, after earthly Vanities; and, proceeding upon the mistaken Principles of corrupt Flesh and Blood, they honour Vice with the Name of Virtue, and stigmatize Virtue with the opprobrious Characters of Vice. The Care to provide for another World, they ridicule for Weakness and Cowardice; and a hardened Contempt of Heaven and Hell they would pass upon the World for Courage, and Wit, and good Sense. But *Woe to them* (says the Prophet) *who thus call Evil Good, and Good Evil, who put Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness, that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter,* (Isai. v. 20.) Such was the Perverseness of those chief Priests, who were proud to think, that none of the Scribes or Pharisees, the Men of Quality and Reputation had believed in Jesus, (*John* vii.) Such that of those Christians in the last Times, who St. Peter says (2 Epist. ch. ii.) shall cause the Way of Truth to be evil spoken of, and expose Christianity to the Censure and Re-

proach of Infidels. *Because they have forsaken the right Way, and are gone astray, following the Way of Balaam the Son of Bosor, who loved the Wages of Unrighteousness : Whose Judgment now of a long time lingreth not, and their Damnation slumbereth not.* The very Patience of God, by which he forbears them; his seeing their wicked Actions, and holding his peace; those Bowels of Long-suffering, and tender Mercy, by which he defers their Destruction, serve to no other end, but to *treasure up* to themselves a heavier Portion of Wrath, *against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God.* For the more remarkably kind, and compassionate, and gentle he hath been, in suspending such Mens Punishment, during this Season of Trial and Mercy; the more severe, and terrible will the Execution of his Judgments be, when that time of Mercy is expired, and the Rigours of his Justice take place. Their Destruction too is irretrievable, and past remedy, because they are in love with Ruin, hate those that labour to undeceive them, and think nothing so troublesome, so insupportable, as the Rebukes, and wholesome Admonitions, given them for the good of their Souls.

These

These are the Seducements and False Measures most usual with them, who forsake the Way of Salvation. When once a Man is out of the right Road, every Step he takes is for the worse; and one Mistake draws on an infinite Train of more and greater. But since imprudent Men are extremely subject rather to change than to correct their Errors, by falling into a new while they are running away from an old one; therefore I think it necessary in the next place to prevent this Unhappiness: And, after having shewed how Men wander from the right Way at first, to shew some of those Seducements, to which they are liable, when endeavouring to recover themselves, and return into that right Way again.



C H A P. VII.

*Errors to be avoided in Correcting our
Errors.*

I. **T**H E Sinner is not of himself sensible that he goes astray: He wanders wide, and perceives it not, till enlightned by Grace. This discovers to him the good Way

Way he forsakes; this inspires him with Resolutions of returning into it. But even that Resolution many times proves no better than a new Error. Men satisfy themselves with resolving well, and stop there: And even those Resolves are only the faint Motions of a languishing Desire, like that of *Solomon's* Sluggard, who wills and wills not; such as spends it self in idle Wishes, the Multitude whereof distracts and stifles his best Intentions. They are continually putting off their Conversion, as *St. Augustin* observes*, who was for deferring all till to-morrow. The Concern of their Souls is esteemed one of those uneasy things, which, in tenderness to their own Quiet, they banish as much as they can out of their Thoughts. Even the making of their Will takes place before the setting their Conscience in order: All their other Affairs are taken care of betimes, but as for Conversion and Salvation, these are reserved for old Age; and Men give themselves to God, when the World will have no more to do with them. Nay, when they are advanced so far as a peremptory Resolution

* *Modo, ecce modo, sine paululum; sed modo & modo non habebat modum. Conf. l. 8. c. 5.*

Quamdiu? Quamdiu? Cras & Cras; quare non modo? Id. l. 8. c. 12.

of Amendment, yet even then this Resolution is in effect vain and unconstant, and deceitful: They accuse, and they justify themselves: They condemn their past Follies, and immediately contrive Excuses for them; they would renounce Sin, and yet they would not; they act in contradiction to themselves, and give their Tongues and Hearts the lye*; several fair Pretences they form to themselves, several weighty Obstructions they labour under, and profess to lament: *Well, (say they) this Soul of mine must be taken care of:* And it must indeed. For the designing it, is of no consequence, unless it be accomplished; and thus themselves frequently tell themselves; but all to very little purpose. For Life runs off in the midst of these airy Intentions, and Death surprizes them, before they have done any thing at all in the Matter. At the bottom, their Desires are for a good Life here, and Heaven hereafter; but they boggle at the Trouble which must attend them; they have some good Motions, but such as are opposed and overpower'd by vicious Inclinations. They likewise deceive

* *Sæpe sibi mens ipsa mentitur, Gregor.*

Abrumpatur illa interminabilis sæcularium negotiorum catena. Et ille de necessitatibus unus per totam vitam labor.
Euch. ad Val.

themselves with some Efforts of a superficial Repentance, but it is such as lies more in the Head than the Heart; and they depend upon some little outward Reformation, without purging the inward Parts, or going to the Root of the Disease. All this is but a Round of Desires; and imaginary Conversion, but at the same time a State of real and substantial Faults. Sometimes they begin well, but end ill. If they change their Behaviour, this Alteration is managed, more according to the Inconstancy of their own Mind, than by Obedience to the Spirit of God. The Heart is still the same. And all this pretended Recovery is only a shifting of the Disease. Such is the Condition of most Men, whose Hearts are divided between God and the World; and would fain cleave to the one, without forsaking the other.

II. The Second Error upon this Occasion is a vicious sort of Shame, which suppresses the best Desires and Intentions, and checks all Thoughts of Returning to God, when a Man hath gone astray for a long time already. This mistaken Modesty is like the Dragon in *St. John*, which is described standing ready to devour the Child of Light as soon as it was born. Men stand out against all holy Motions, and drop their Designs of living better, by a wretched foolish

foolish Concern, which they pretend to have upon the account of those they call their Friends; to whom their Conduct ought to be justified, and who, they are desirous, should see that they maintain their Character. Thus did *Victorinus* (as * *St. Augustin* relates) stand in awe of his Friends, — and nothing stuck with him more in his Conversion, than the Apprehension of giving them offence. How many once well-intended Reformations have proved abortive, meerly by being over-power'd by the imaginary Terrors of this mistaken Prudence? How many Souls have been lost, — by submitting to the Tyranny of that vain Thought, *What will People say of me?* — And by continuing Slaves to the Opinion of the World, rather than applying themselves seriously to consider the Weight and Necessity of their Duty? This ridiculous Caution is the High-way to eternal Destruction. It hindred the Conversion of the Jews, who could not have a due Regard for the Son of God and his Doctrine, because they had so excessive a one for the Honour and Praise of Men. This makes Men obstinate and tenacious in their Errors; they

* Amicos suos verebatur offendere, sed depuduit vanitati, & erubuit veritati. *Aug. l. 8. Conf. c. 2.*

think their Character and Honour concern'd to persist in the wrong, rather than own themselves in a Mistake. This is the Bane of those wretched People, who have spent all their Days in Extravagance and Debauchery. They count it better and more creditable to die hard, than to give the World occasion to talk of their Change; because indeed common Opinion is the Rule they govern themselves by. They go on in their own Ways, meerly because they have done so a great while, and been bred, and lived all along in them. They are come to Years of Discretion, and because they ought to have been wise sooner, they resolve now never to be so at all. It is too late they think to mend, and less Disgrace to be damned, than to begin a good Work, when their Life is almost at an end. And bring themselves they cannot to undeceive others, with whom they have conversed so many Years, by acknowledging their Errors, and undeceiving themselves.

III. A third sort of mistaken Men there are, who are able to conquer the Weakness and Irresolution of their own Minds, and can despise the Opinion and Censure of the World, but they take false Measures, and set out wrong. They think themselves safe, and yet are out of the Way, because they take the Shadow and Appearance of Virtue
for

for the Thing itself; they form to themselves a false Righteousness; and that which they depend upon, deceives them in the End. According to that Observation of the wise Man, (*Prov. xvi. 25.*) *There is a Way which seemeth right unto a Man, but the End thereof are the Ways of Death.* They entertain false Notions of Faith, and Religion, and the Fear of God, and Repentance, and Humility, and Devotion, and even of Reason it self: And for want of true Principles, they set up to themselves such as are empty and imaginary. These Men are irregular by Rule; and settle their Conscience upon Interest, and Passion, and carnal Considerations. They expect to find Life in the Region of Death; and think they submit to the Law of God, while in truth they only follow their own Humour, and set off Vice with a specious Colour of Virtue. Thus the fine Ladies vindicate their Luxury and Vanity, by a Pretence that these things are what the World expects from People of their Quality. Thus Superiors call Rigour and an imperious Spirit, a Love of Discipline and necessary Severity. For there is nothing so extravagant, which at this rate may not be justified by an Appearance of Duty; nor any Management so vicious, that some Pretence may not be found to cover or to recommend it.

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for

for the Thing itself; they form to themselves a false Righteousness; and that which they depend upon, deceives them in the End. According to that Observation of the wise Man, (*Prov. xvi. 25.*) *There is a Way which seemeth right unto a Man, but the End thereof are the Ways of Death.* They entertain false Notions of Faith, and Religion, and the Fear of God, and Repentance, and Humility, and Devotion, and even of Reason it self: And for want of true Principles, they set up to themselves such as are empty and imaginary. These Men are irregular by Rule; and settle their Conscience upon Interest, and Passion, and carnal Considerations. They expect to find Life in the Region of Death; and think they submit to the Law of God, while in truth they only follow their own Humour, and set off Vice with a specious Colour of Virtue. Thus the fine Ladies vindicate their Luxury and Vanity, by a Pretence that these things are what the World expects from People of their Quality. Thus Superiors call Rigour and an imperious Spirit, a Love of Discipline and necessary Severity. For there is nothing so extravagant, which at this rate may not be justified by an Appearance of Duty; nor any Management so vicious, that some Pretence may not be found to cover or to recommend it.

Men frame a Scheme of Morality which shall comply with every thing; and bring their Consciences to such a pass, that no sort of Evil shall give them Disquiet. Every strict Zealot finds out some Art and Method, to refine his Hypocrisy. Ill-Humour passes for Sincerity, Cenforiousness for Zeal, and all manner of Wickedness is not only excused, but even sanctified. The most furiously passionate Man alive is not without some Arguments to defend the Violence of his Rage. Every thing is false and out of order in the Minds of Men thus corrupt in their Principles. When they are afraid to offend God, this Fear proceeds not from the Crime, but from the Punishment of Sin. The pretended Reproaches of Conscience are no other than the Terrors natural to the Danger of their Condition. When they accuse themselves of Folly and confess their Sins, this Remorse is in their Mouth and Words only, without any sincere Indignation, or Repentance in the Heart. They imagine their Wounds healed, while they are still bleeding and green. It is not the Gospel they believe and submit to in the Exercise of religious Duties; but their own Imagination, which models the Articles of Faith according to its fanciful Scheme within: And believes and practises just what the Person

son hath a mind to. This is the Case of that false Devotion, and those pleasing Satisfaction in approaching to God, with which Men amuse their own Souls: When all the while these are not the Effect of Piety, but the Inventions of their own Mind, and the Consequence of their Temper and particular Constitution. A Life thus led is no better than a long Scene of habitual Error and Deceit; and Men are led into a Fool's Paradise at last, while they impose upon their own Judgments, but cannot with all their Artifice mock or impose upon Almighty God.

IV. The fourth is that Vanity which insinuates it self even into the most solemn and holy Exercises of Religious Duties. Foolish vain-glorious Man loves Virtue, that he may get Reputation by it: He denies himself and abandons all, but even this Mortification he values and is exalted upon; he sometimes conceals himself with great industry, but it is with a design of being more publickly known. For how many Arts does Pride use, or what Form will it not take to shew it self? Every Motion of the Soul serves to disguise it. By this we take a liberty of censuring the Behaviour of others, as soon as we have brought our own to be somewhat regular; and cannot content our selves with being

innocent, without presuming to judge and sentence severely every blameable Action that comes in our way. Thus, if we have no sensual or worldly Inclinations, yet we abound with Uncharitableness and spiritual Pride; even our Modesty is vain, our Humility tainted with intolerable Presumption, and our greatest Virtues full of Ostentation. The foolish * Virgins in the Parable, who were blinded with a false Confidence in the Purity of their State, were found at their Lord's coming to want Oil in their Lamps. That secret Pride, which render'd them impure in God's eyes, was concealed till they came to die; but then it turn'd to so sad an account, that all their Chastity could not compensate for it. Now the true Believer is not vain-glorious or self-conceited; he labours to recommend himself to the Approbation of Almighty God; — he observes the constant Dependence upon — his Mercy in which he lives; he is very sensible, that were he not supported by that mighty Hand, he should fall every Moment: — And his Conversation is pure and acceptable throughout, because it is entirely modest and humble †. And this is the peculiar

* Dum de virginitate sua gloriam foris expectunt, in vase suis oleum habere noluerunt. *Greg. Hom. 12 in Evang.*

† Vanitatem tanto magis fuge, quanto melior efficeris; cætera enim vitia crescunt vitiis, vanitas virtutibus. *Eucher. ad Val.*

Danger of the Vice we have been speaking of ; that virtuous Men are most exposed to it. For whereas other ill Qualities are in-gender'd and promoted by one another, and always propagate in their own kind, this is a sort of heterogeneous Production, and is created and cherished only by good ones.

V. The fifth Error incident to Men in the Reformation of their Lives, is Self-love ; which prevails to that degree, that they follow their own Inclinations, when they pretend most to follow the Will of God. Nay, even when we ourselves imagine, that our Intentions are set upon Obedience to his Commands, our Interests, and Inclinations, and private Prospects are the Principles that govern us : And we only walk in our own ways, when we appear to our selves and others, to walk in his. Thus did that covetous King of *Israel*, who did his own Will in reserving the most part of the *Amalekites* Treasure for Booty, while he imagined himself fulfilling the Will of God in destroying the Persons, (1 *Sam.* xv.) Men often seek for God with a design — to find themselves ; and go to him, only that — they may take him in their way home again. The Fastings, the Mortifications, the solemn Festivals, and ceremonious Applications of his own People heretofore he de-

clared his Indignation against for this Reason, because in the Days of *their Fast they found Pleasure*, and regarded themselves much more than him, (*Isai. lviii.*)

Thus it is, that Men form to themselves Schemes of Perfection, and new Ways of Salvation, in agreement with their own Humour and Opinion. Our selves are what — we often seek even in Devotion it self; we impute that to Religion which proceeds from our selves; and give Countenance and Authority to our private Fancies, by pretending that venerable Name, and deriving their Original from God. We profess to seek his Glory, in things whose true End is to serve our own Interest and Reputation. For after all, Virtue taken abstractedly, and separate from the gainful Consequences of it, hath but a very poor share in our Intentions and Desires. Men love the Advantages and the Pleasure of a retired and devout Life, more than the Piety of it; there are some secret Views of Honour, and Credit, which, though the World perceive not, yet the Person himself is very tenderly affected with, even then when he had renounced all selfish and worldly Considerations. And the reason why they still continue to move him, is because Self was at the bottom of that very Renunciation.
And

And thus, as * *St. Augustin* says, they who are farthest from Justice and Truth, yet would fain appear to the World to follow them; and that they may do so, whatever Measures they think fit to take, they call them by the Names of Just and True.

These seem to be the principal, and most dangerous Errors, by which Men are misguided in their Way to Salvation. But the sincere and judicious Christian, who shall honestly and faithfully sound his Conscience to the bottom, and by frequent Examination endeavour to discover the deceitful Depths of his own Heart, will find no doubt a great many more than I have, or could possibly have, taken express notice of. He will there find his greatest Purity blemished with impure Designs of Interest and Vanity. He will plainly see, that what passes upon him and others for Piety, is but too often nothing better than false and worldly Wisdom; and that his most disinterested Love of God, does at last resolve it self into a Principle of Self-preservation, and a servile Dread of Divine Justice. Thus if he set himself in good earnest to unfold all the intricate Windings of his Soul, somewhat of

* Sic amatur Veritas, ut quicumq; aliud amant, hoc quod amant Veritatem esse velint, *Conf. l. 10. c. 23.*

Counterfeit and base Alloy will be discovered in every Virtue, and a world of Dissimulation in all his Vices. For what Weakness, what Deceit is it, that the Heart of Man is not subject to? If he be humble, his Humility is like *Saul's*, who submitted himself before God, but desired at the same time, that the Prophet would do him honour before the People, (1 *Sam.* xv.) If his Hands are innocent, his Heart is depraved; if he have Zeal and Warmth, he wants Perseverance in Goodness; if he be pious, he is proud and presumptuous too; if he be outwardly strict and regular, that fair Appearance covers a world of inward Irregularities, which he neither corrects, nor perhaps discerns in himself. It is usual to observe many Men zealous in their Intentions, who yet are led astray into false Measures by a lurking Hypocrisy, which they conceal both from themselves, and from those who have the Guidance and Care of their Souls. Some again we may meet with, who are eternally perplexing themselves with fresh Scruples; who measure their Virtues by their Doubts, take no other prospect of their Duty, but that which represents to them the Dangers and Difficulties of doing well; that fall by an indiscreet Fear of falling, and suffer themselves to be vanquished, before ever they engage
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the Enemy. What shall I say of those Men, who in Matters of Religion stick close to the Letter which kills, without attending to the Spirit that giveth Life? They vainly affect a rigorous Exactness in all the Forms and solemn Acts of Virtue, and are wretchedly negligent in those inward and substantial parts, wherein the very Soul and true Essence of Christianity consists. They depend upon the outward Observation and Exercise of Devotion, and think this will carry them to Heaven, while they continue in the manifest Neglect or Breach of God's Commandments; they make new Systems of Morality, and forsake the Directions of the Gospel; they are skilled in the Virtues of Angels, and remain ignorant in those which concern Men and Christians; they renounce those Duties which are proper to their respective Capacities, and apply themselves to such as are indifferent, and foreign to their Condition; their Notions are severe, but their Conversation loose and negligent; they chuse the safest side in common Business, but in Concerns of Religion follow the slenderest Probabilities. What shall we think again of that infinite number of People, who follow their Saviour, as Sheep do their Shepherd, without hearing his Voice; or of the many more who hear that Voice without understanding

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it ; or of the many more still, who understand what they ought to do ; but do not what they ought to do ? In a word, What can we think of them, who trouble themselves about their Neighbours Actions, and see distinctly what becomes others, but never regard their own Duty, nor consider what Obligations lie upon their Conscience ; that profess a passionate Concern for other Peoples Danger, but take no Care to secure their own Salvation ; that are wise and discerning in their Business, but stupid and blind in their own ? These are so many, and such a multitude of like Errors are to be found in the World, that it were endless but to mention them particularly.

But the most deplorable Error of all is, when Men give themselves up to the leading of such Guides, as are themselves Wanderers from the right Way : And this is a Misfortune, which sometimes happens to those, who have been so happy as to keep their Minds disengaged from all the former Seducements. Some Persons there are very zealous and sincere in their Desires and Endeavours for Salvation, who yet continue in the broad Way to Destruction, because they follow those that lead them wrong. The fault St. *Chrysostom* finds with the Jews, (*Hom. in Matth. Ser. 4.*) is even in our days more common than can easily be imagined : That, I mean, of giving more
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Credit to the false Prophets than to the true; not taking sufficient care to distinguish between the Preachers of Truth, and Falshood; despising the Voice of the good Shepherds, and running after Hirelings and Strangers. And this Disease becomes incurable, when God for a Punishment of Mens Sins, gives them up to those Guides, whom himself in just Judgment hath darkened, to take away from them the Spirit of Discretion, and deliver them up to Ignorance and Error. And this he sometimes does, to visit upon them the horrible Impiety of profaning their holy Character; and following their own vain Imaginations in the Guidance of others, rather than they will adhere to the Light of God's own Word and Spirit; or to chastise that ambitious and aspiring Temper, by which they set up for Teachers and Pastors, without any regular Call, or those Qualifications, which are necessary for the due Discharge of so weighty an Office. The Direction and Government of the Church are appointed by God, and put into the Hands of chosen Men, for Edification, and not for Destruction. You are placed as Overseers of the Flock, not for your own, but for their Advantage; if this important Trust, which the most eminent Saints heretofore have undertook with Reluctancy and Trembling, work
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in you no awful Impressions, it is by reason of your Pride and Presumption; and because a false and worldly, not a true godly Zeal hath pushed you forward to the Undertaking. And if you shall pretend to be Physicians of Souls and heal others, while you your selves continue full of *Wounds and Bruises, and putrifying Sores*; if you profess to teach the Way of Life, and yet walk on in Sin and Death; if you, like those Shepherds reproached by the Prophet, (*Nahum* iii. 18.) flumber, instead of watching, over the Flock whom you pretend to guard; your Power is a mere Usurpation, and your Call to the Ministry false and forfeited. Wo to those dissembling Guides, who affect to pass for perfect Patterns of Virtue, while they are flattering and unlike Copies. Who in the Exercise of their Ministry become the Instruments of God's Indignation to the Persons under their Charge; instead of being what their Station intended them for, Vessels of Mercy, and Instruments of Reconciliation in the Day of his fierce Anger! I mention not here those Preachers, who in distributing the Bread of God, poison their own Souls, with that very Nourishment, which they prepare for their Hearers. Nor them, who walk themselves in smooth and pleasant Ways, while they prescribe Severity and Self-denial to their
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their Congregations; nor them, who for Interest flatter their People, and lull them asleep with a false Peace and Security, by base Compliance with their Vices, and a cruel Concealment of their real Danger. Nor shall I insist upon that terrible Mischief of Scandal and an ill Example; the Rock upon which unwary Souls are so exceeding apt to split. For how many of all Conditions, but especially Men of Quality, are undone and hardened in Vice, by the Countenance and Authority it receives from the Numbers, or the Character, of the Persons that indulge themselves in the Practice of it? In a word; there are Seducements and Snares every-where, and those, who are heedful and considerate, will find no part of the Way to Heaven, which is not thick set with them. And how shall we prevent or escape this manifold Mischief? No way so likely sure, as by lifting up our Hearts incessantly to God, and earnestly imploring his Assistance in so difficult an Undertaking. To which we must likewise add our own most constant and diligent Endeavours to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; which was the Apostle's Advice to his *Philippians*, (Ch. ii. 12.) and the enforcing this good Counsel shall be the Business of my next Chapter.



C H A P. VIII.

That Men ought to work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling.

NO doubt they ought. For what Security can the Christian have in a Life so exposed to Hazards; and how can he be too careful and apprehensive, while walking in a Way so very intricate and apt to be mistaken? The Road is very full of Turnings and Precipices, and every step he takes, the Man is in danger of being mazed and lost. *Happy* therefore is *he, that feareth always*, (Prov. xxviii. 14) and moves with constant Circumspection in so difficult a Passage. This Consideration it was, upon which the wise Man called *the Fear of the Lord, the Beginning of Wisdom*. And most certain it is, that the first setting out in the Way to Salvation, must be a Distrust and mean Opinion of our own Worth and Abilities. A Disposition, which will not be hard for any Man to attain and be persuaded to, who is but once well acquainted with himself. For the Darknes of our Understanding is so gross, the Weakness

ness of our Will so manifold, the Miseries —
 and Frailties of our Nature so sensible and
 so deplorable, that they are very just and
 great Occasions of Humiliation and Fear.
 The strictest Righteousness of Man is no —
 better than Unrighteousness, * if God should
 be extreme in his Judgment upon it, says St.
 Gregory. And *Isaiah*, (Ch. lxiv. 6.) *We*
are all as an unclean Thing, we all do fade
as a Leaf, and our Iniquities like a strong
Wind have carried us away. This Re-
 flection makes me even tremble, when I ob-
 serve that false Ease and treacherous Tran-
 quillity of Mind, in which the Ladies of —
 Condition enjoy themselves, in the midst
 of that effeminate, that pleasurable, that
 thoughtless Life, which most of them at the
 utmost peril of their Souls are wont to lead.
 They scarce give themselves the trouble of
 a serious Thought, about securing this great
 Concern of their Salvation. Prayers, and
 Alms, and Sacraments, and other outward
 and ordinary Means of compassing that End,
 are almost grown into perfect Disuse among
 the Women of Mode and Gaiety. They —
 live in a dreadful Neglect and stupid For-
 getfulness of God, and take more pains to

* Omnis humana Justitia Injustitia est, si strictè judicetur.
 Greg. in *Job*, c. 9.

+ ruin themselves, than good Men do to save themselves. We read in the Lives of the Fathers, (*Ruf. l. 3.*) that the Abbot *Pambo*, meeting one day upon the Road to *Alexandria* a Courtisan richly habited, and with a very engaging Air, could not forbear bewailing the Misery and Folly of this poor Creature; but with a Sigh made this Reflection: *Ah! how happy should I be, did I but take as much pains to please God, and save my self; as this vain Woman does to be agreeable to the World, and to ruin her self!* Such in effect is the Life of most of our modern Ladies. One Hair amiss, or a Knot ill tied, gives them great Concern, and whole Days almost are spent in decking their Persons, that they may draw the Eyes and Admiration of Men. But Eternity, and rendring themselves acceptable in God's sight, is the least part of their Care. And how deplorably wretched are these People? They profess themselves Christians; but if they be so, let them consider a little, what a madness it is to entertain the Doctrines of the Gospel, and pretend to believe such a Judgment to come, as that hath warned us of, without expressing any fear of so dreadful a Reckoning, or applying themselves to provide against it? What Blindness and Stupidity is it, to know that *God is a Searcher of Spirits*, and will weigh

weigh all our Actions in the balance of Equity and Truth, and not tremble at the apprehensions of his Justice? For if, as St. Peter says, *The Righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the Ungodly, and the Sinner appear*; or what Confidence can he have in the safety of his Condition?

Let us enquire a little into the justice of such People's Pretensions, and what they can alledge in behalf of such a management. What Claim can you, who make it a Principle to live easy and pleasant, and to gratify your Inclination in every thing; what Claim, I say, can you put in to that Kingdom, which is promised to such alone, as deny and mortify their Desires; and strive against what you so industriously indulge? Where are your good Works, your Charity and Alms-deeds, your Fruits meet for Repentance? What have you done to deserve that Crown, which is laid up as a Prize for them who fight manfully, and according to the strict Rules of Combat? How many weary Steps, how many anxious Cares, and what infinite Pains and Disquiet are you content to bestow upon a Temporal Estate; and do you expect that your Eternal Inheritance should cost you nothing? Consider that Glory which the Martyrs purchased with their Blood; which Holy Virgins and other eminent Saints could not attain to at

less expence, than that of renouncing the World, with all its Vanities, and sensual Delights; and which so many good Men still have not the Confidence to hope for, but upon Condition of painful and persevering Virtue, diligent doing, and patient suffering of God's Will; and are you exempt from these Terms, or is your Life privileged above that of other Men? Who hath given you any assurance of being more gently dealt with than your Brethren in the Day of your Lord's Wrath? You especially, who have so long despised the Riches of his Mercy and Forbearance? * It is an Infatuation common to worldly-minded Men (says *St. Gregory*) that their Hopes and Thoughts are too intent upon Transitory Enjoyments, to bear any due Regard to those that are Durable and Eternal. They think so much of this Lite, that they never think at all of the next. Their Heart is so darkned with the Ignorance of their Understanding that the Day-spring from on high can find no entrance, nor scatter the thick Clouds that lie upon their Souls. The Threatnings of an

* Sic cæcitate cordis oculus clauditur, ut æternæ luci non intendatur. 18 *Mor. c. 7.*

Spem totam in rebus transeuntibus ponunt, quæ transeunt concupiscunt, cumque nimis transeuntia cogitant, mansura nullatenus sperant. *Ibid.*

angry God, the Terrors of his Judgments, the uncertain Approach of Death, the dreadful Consequences of that great Affair, which the Gospel styles the *one thing needful*, make no Impression upon them, because they give themselves no leave to think of these Matters. And the only Reason of their inward Quiet, and seeming Satisfaction, is, because they live without Reflection, and use all possible endeavours not to see their own Danger.

But let not us, who have the Faith of Christ, remain in this unthinking State: Let us remember, and look for and tremble at the expectation of that dreadful Day, in which God shall render to every Man according to his Works. Let us imitate the most eminent Saints who wrought out their Salvation with profound Reverence and godly Fear. Such was the Temper of the primitive Christians, whose Souls a lively Faith hath filled with great and noble Idea's. They kept their Eyes ever fix'd upon Heaven, where all their Treasure and their Hope lay. They lived in perpetual awe of God's Judgments. They look'd indeed with Comfort upon the Treasures of his Mercy, but then they did not overlook the Treasures of his Wrath and Vengeance too. And that great Day, in which God shall do himself right, and take a just Revenge, upon all the out-

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rageous

rageous Impieties of those hardened Wretches who have abused his Mercy, appeared to them so much more formidable, in proportion as their Faith was more vigorous, because this gave them a juster Notion of the dreadful and mighty Consequence of it. St. *Paul*, after he had received the First-Fruits of Grace, and was enlightned with the clearest Rays of the Spirit of Adoption, excites the Faith, and awakens the Fears of his Christians, by telling them, that he still laboured continually to *bring his Body into Subjection, lest after having preached to others, he himself at last should be a Cast-away*, (1 Cor. ix. 27.) St. *Jerom* acknowledges, that he could find no absolute safety even in the greatest Solitude; the remembrance of those Freedoms and Diversions he had allowed himself in his younger Days, was continually returning upon his Imagination, and gave great interruption to his most religious Exercises: The Idea's of that Vanity and Luxury, which he had formerly beheld among the *Roman Ladies*, pursued and dogged him close into the Desarts: And the utmost Austerities of a retired Life were not able to guard him from their Assaults. For his Flesh, even when mortified with Fastings and Sackcloth, rebelled against the Spirit still, and the most rigorous Humiliations could not deliver him from Horror upon

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on each single Reflection of the last Judgment. The shrill sound of that Trumpet, which must awaken the Dead out of sleep, and summon all Mankind before the great Tribunal, was ever rattling in his Ears, and shewing him the terrible Pomp of his Judge. And his Soul was pierced through with Trembling and Astonishment, as oft as these Images were painted afresh in his Mind.

How many other illustrious Saints, after having passed their Lives in the most abstracted Solitude, that so by leaving the World they might meditate upon this terrible Day of the Lord without distraction of Thought, and prepare themselves for it by a long and solemn course of Repentance, have yet look'd pale at the approach of Death? And whence this Amazement and Concern, but from the Contemplation of the Divine Justice, and that severe Scrutiny, which neither the Strictness of their Lives, nor the Purity and Innocence of their Hearts could shield them against, when they considered, that upon this fatal, this uncertain moment, the Affairs of Eternity must entirely depend? We read in the Lives of the Fathers, that *Theophilus*, Patriarch of *Alexandria*, after having lived long in great Caution and Holiness, when he came to die, said to his Friend, * *O happy Arsenius, who* †

* Beatus es, Arseni, quia semper hanc horam ob oculos habuisti. *Pelag. l. 1. de Vit. Patrum.*

hast always had this Hour in view, and made it thy constant Business, to prepare for it! And the tenth Book of the same History informs us, that a certain Anchoret, whose Virtue had struck an awe into the very wild Beasts themselves, could not yet be void of Fear concerning his own Salvation. The Lions, among whom he slept securely, trembled at his presence, but he himself trembled no less at the presence of God, and the recollection of his own Frailties and great Imperfections. Happy then is he, who perpetually humbles his Soul under the unspeakable and mysterious Counsels of God; and entertains such a Dread of his Justice, as does not destroy a becoming Confidence in his Mercy and Goodness! Now when such Persons as these, notwithstanding their extraordinary Sanctity, have yet distrusted their own Merits, and been so solicitous what the Event of the last Judgment would be to them; how prodigiously senseless is that Sinner, who imagines himself in perfect safety? The best Men have ever been the most humble: And they, whose Lives have been freest from Faults, have express least assurance in their own Innocence, when they came to die; because their Faith had opened their Eyes, shewed them to themselves in a true Light, and convinced them of what infinite consequence Death and Judgment are to every Christian.

But,

But, if the Examples of other Men are not sufficient to terrify us, let us at least turn our Eyes and Thoughts inward upon ourselves. There we shall soon observe the Corruption of our Hearts, the Inconstancy, the daily woful Instances of our Weakness, — the vast variety of Dangers that hem us in ; the Difficulty of this great Work, and the general Effeminacy and wretched Carelessness of these last Days. For in the midst of an Age so extremely depraved as ours, who can preserve his Innocence, and not do ill? Who can be so steadfast and faithful, as always to do well? Who can be sure, that even his most holy Actions have been — attended with all that Simplicity, all that Freedom from By-respects, and Passion, and Interest, which the Purity of our Religion requires? And if we could account for what we have done, yet how shall we — be able to justify all the Ends and Intentions upon which we have acted? How hard an Undertaking is it to sift our Hearts — to the bottom, to see through all the intricate Windings of them, and form a true Judgment of the secret Springs and Principles, which put us into motion? There lie alas ! many Weaknesses in the remotest corners of our Souls, which we our selves — many times are not sensible of. The most perfect Men have some Reserves, some

Niceties for Honour and worldly Considerations, which they do not, or do not care to see. And the most mortified have their darling Sins, and Defects, which they still cherish, through some partial Tenderness for themselves.

What need I mention that incessant War between the Flesh and Spirit, in which so many gallant Men have fallen : Or that Remissness, so exceeding common even in the best of us all, who, after long and frequent Encounters with the Difficulties of Virtue, have at last been tired out, and lost their Resolution in the Fatigues of so laborious a Conflict. The Weakness of Man is so great, that he is ever liable to mistake his own Condition, if he do not prevent that Error by constant Remembrances of his own Misery. He is an Earthen Vessel, and, as such, in danger of breaking every Moment.

Let then even the Righteous be afraid for himself, in the midst of the sundry Snares, to which his Virtue stands exposed. When we are told, that *Samson* was bereaved of his Strength, that *David* fell into the two blackest Offences, and that the Wisdom of *Solomon* did not preserve him from great and grievous Errors, who can read these things and not tremble ? St. *Augustin's* Remark is
 + very just, *That the Fall of the Strong is like a Clap of Thunder to awaken and terrify*

rify the Weak. And indeed when even the Stars are darkned, and the Heavens melt at the Presence of God; when the Faithfulness of the most celebrated Saints hath been shaken and given ground; when he charges even his Angels, those purest and most perfect of all his Creatures, with Folly; what are we, poor Worms of the Earth, that grovel in Mire and Filth, that we should presume our Virtue impregnable? If the best Men under the Law heretofore made no difficulty to confess, that their most exalted Piety was blemished with many secret Defects; if the Evidence of the thing constrained them to acknowledge a great Alloy of Impurity and Weakness, in their most righteous Actions, and such as they laboured to recommend themselves to God by; what can we think is the Case of Sinners, who do not only converse, but comply with the Corruptions of a most profligate Age? And where indeed shall we promise ourselves safety? or what Hour can we call our own? For Man is to-day, and to-morrow he is no more. And how frequent Instances do we see of Persons snatched away in the midst of their Days, surprized by Death before the Business of Life be half done, with Minds full of Projects, and Pleasures, and thinking of nothing less than Eternity? And were there

no other Danger, what Security can we have, who hold our Lives by so uncertain a Tenure?

Let us then betimes and in good earnest deliver our selves from all those vain Delusions, which obstruct our Care of this great Work, and abate of that Fear and Trembling which the Apostle prescribes, as a proper Disposition for effecting it. Let us revive and refresh those moving Idea's upon our Hearts, which Faith had formerly engraven there, and take care to draw the Lines of Eternity so strong, that they may ever affect us, ever quicken our Endeavours to proceed in the strait Way, and fix our fickle Minds in inviolable Fidelity and Perseverance. Let us now lend an ear to the Lamentations of the Prophets, those Sighs and Groans extorted from them, by the Consideration, how very few they are that shall be saved; and what an infinite Company make the broad Way their Choice, and shall be given up to everlasting Destruction in that Day. Let us represent (as we are able) to our selves the manner in which God shall exercise his Judgments, what that Day of his Wrath, that cruel Day (as the Prophet *Isaiah* styles it, *Ch. xiii. 9.*) shall be. Remember that the Son of God, who now with all the Tenderness of a most affectionate Father pities his Prodigal Son; he

he who seeks his stray Sheep, and follows it into the Wilderness with all the cheerful Pains, and a solicitous Concern of a loving Shepherd, will then call every one of us to account for our Actions; and the Character of a Judge in which he shall appear will oblige him to Severity, as much greater then, as his abused Mercy to us hath been in the mean while. This is that Lamb in the Revelation, which shall then become a Lion to devour those Sinners, who have been injurious to his Goodness. And then shall he exhibit himself to the View of the whole World with all the terrible Pomp that Majesty is capable of. *The Sun and Moon shall be darkned, the Stars shall fall from Heaven, and the Powers of Heaven shall be shaken,* (Matth. xxiv.) The Earth also shall quake for fear, and all Mankind shall be seized with Horrour, at the sight of a Judge no longer to be entreated. And who can sustain the Burden of his fierce Anger? For as St. *Paul* admonishes us, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,* (Heb. x.) The Power of Men is limited and short, they can only punish as Men: But the rigorous Judge, at whose Tribunal all that ever was done shall be exposed to the View of Heaven and Earth, shall punish with all the Omnipotence of God; and discharge all those Treasures
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of Wrath, which he hath heaped up for that very purpose, that he might let fly all his Thunder, and the utmost Terrors of his Vengeance at the Heads of hardned Sinners. As his Patience formerly knew no Bounds, so neither shall his Justice then; no Power shall be able to oppose, no Relenting shall check his Course. He shall himself be Judge and Accuser both, the Vows we made in Baptism, he was Witness to, and will revenge our broken Faith. Nothing can be concealed from his Knowledge, but all things lie naked and open in his sight. All the eternal Advantages of high Post, and Parts, and Riches, and Greatness shall then disappear, and only the Man and his Actions be considered, as they are abstractedly, and in themselves. But oh! that fatal Moment! How full of Terror and Destruction will it be, when the now kind and lovely Face of our Saviour shall from thenceforth be for ever hid from the Wicked, and his Ears shut to their loudest Cries and Groans? Ah my God, let me, I beseech thee, have my Punishment in this Life, and Pardon in the next: If Justice must be exercised, let Time be the Season of it; but let Eternity be the Season of Mercy. I am content to feel the Terrors of thy Wrath at present, provided the sweet Comforts of thy Clemency and Goodness may be my joyful

joyful Portion hereafter. But, O ye wise Men of this World, who have employed to vile Purposes the Parts and Wisdom, which God gave you for the promoting his Glory and your own Salvation; and made your Advantages Instruments of deeper and more certain Ruin, tremble at the Apprehensions of this Judge. And all ye Great ones of this World, let Confusion and Amazement overwhelm you, to think that the Power, the Plenty, the other distinguishing Favours of Providence, which made a difference between your Circumstances and those of common Men, have served to no other Effect, but to upbraid your own Ingratitude, to provoke the just Indignation of so kind a Benefactor, and add to the Measure of your Stripes for abusing the Talents committed to your Charge.

But, if this terrible Process of the last Judgment, if that formidable Army of the Creatures drawn up in Battel to be the Executioners of the Divine Justice upon obstinate Sinners, (as the wise Man tells us they are, *Wisd. v.*) If the publick Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, which shall in that important Day be made after a most just and exact, but withal a most fearful and astonishing, Manner; if these frightful Idea's are yet weakned by their Distance, and pass for Objects too remote
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to excite our Diligence and Fidelity ; let us at least attend to those Considerations, which are sensible and present. The Swift-ness of Time, the Shortness of Life, the Uncertainty of our Call and great Change, the Intricacies of our Passage, the Shelves, and Sands of which this dangerous Sea is full ; and the infinite variety of Accidents daily and hourly capable of working our Ruin ; let these however awaken us, and shake off that Stupidity, which would expose us to a surprize, never to be recovered, if once it be our Unhappiness to be overtaken unawares.

But withal ; to the Intent our most diligent Preparations for Death and Judgment, exprest in the strictest and most holy Conversation possible, may not be disappointed of their desired Success ; we ought to be exceeding careful, that they do not exalt us with too presumptuous Assurances of our future Happiness. It is by no means upon any Desert of our own, that we are allowed to repose any part of our Comfort and — Confidence. For if the least and very first of our Wishes and Pantings after Heaven be not absolutely in our own power, how can we be secure of our own Perseverance ? — And, besides that the Communications of Grace do not entirely depend upon us, it deserves to be considered, that these are

are not at all times equally propitious. But — even when they are most large and liberal, — it will prove no very easy Matter, to keep this Gift in a place so foreign to its purity, as the Heart of corrupt Man; and in the midst of so many Enemies, who are offering violence, and eternally laying designs against it. To this purpose the Devil, whose Power and Subtlety both conspire to render him a very formidable Adversary, makes use with wonderful Address, not of the World only and its Charms against us, but even makes our selves Instruments of our own Ruin. From hence I think it very plain, that no Degree of Perfection and Improvement can set us above the Apostle's Advice, of *working out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. If we have indeed lived up to the Principles of our Profession, and all along testified our Faith by our Works, let us not boast with those indiscreet Labourers in the Gospel, of having born the Burden and Heat of the Day; for possibly, as our Saviour says, in the Close of that Parable, (*Matth. xx.*) notwithstanding our most sanguine Expectations, *there are first which shall be last, and the last shall be first*. If our Conduct be free from blame, and our Reputation unblemished in the eye of the World, let not this puff us up, for there were Virgins, we know, who,
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notwithstanding the Purity of that State, were excluded from the Marriage of the Lamb, (*Matth.* xxv.) If our Way of Living be abstemious and severe, let us not be too big with this Thought, neither; for we read of a Pharisee that fasted twice a Week and was very punctual in his Tithes and Offerings, who yet did not return to his House justified, (*Luke* xviii.) Let us not reckon too much upon our good Works, after such a Warning, as the young Man in the Gospel (*Matth.* xix.) who, though a strict Observer of the moral Law, was not able to come up to Evangelical Perfection. If we have taken leave of the World, yet even so we are not safe: For how many Monks and Anchorets have there been, who, after employing whole Days in Prayer, and whole Nights in Sighs and Groans, and holy Mourning; after bruising their Breasts with Blows, and bathing their Eyes in Tears for their Sins and Frailties, have yet, in the midst of these Smitings and Mortifications, fallen into most horrible Temptations and Disorders?

Palladius Bishop of *Helenopolis* (Vit. Patr. L. 8.) tells us, that one *Eton* a Hermit of *Alexandria*, lived several Years in so spiritual a manner, that he continued sometimes a Month together without taking any sort of Nourishment, except what the
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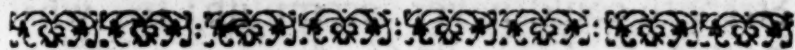
Elements in the Lord's Supper gave him, and yet after all this, fell after so amazing a degree, that he abandoned himself to all sorts of Wickedness. All the World knows the Unhappiness of *Eutyches*, whose Heresy received much greater Reputation from the Character and Conversation of the Man, than from any extraordinary Parts or Learning that he could pretend to. We read in *Sophronius*, that an Anchoret, called + *Severian*, lived upon a Pillar near *Hierapolis* (as *Simeon Stylites* had done) and chose this Retirement, that his austere Life might give countenance to a Heresy propagated by him. St. *Hilary* tells us, * that the Emperor *Constantius* built very magnificent Churches, and distributed great Treasures among the Poor, that he might — with a better grace keep the Catholick Bishops in Prison, and cherish the *Arian* Heresy in his Dominions. So true is it, + that the best Works without a right Principle, and sincere Submission to the Truth, are a very slippery and deceitful Foundation, to build our Hopes of future Happiness upon. Even the bloodiest Sacrifices — of Flesh and Blood, and most merciless Se-

* *Ecclesiae testa struet, ut fidem destruat. Hil. lib. cont. Const. vita functum.*

verities upon our Bodies, are mere Pomp and empty Form, such as will stand us in no stead, if they be not attended and recommended with the Sacrifice of the Soul, and a Will entirely devoted to that of Almighty God.

Since then so many eminent Persons have miscarried in this laborious Undertaking; and wandred from the right Way to Happiness, by such a false Confidence in their own extraordinary Virtues and Severities, as Human Nature is exceeding apt to entertain; since the best and most perfect Saints have humbled themselves before God, and cast all their Confidence upon his Mercy and Readiness to forgive: Who is there among us all that can justify any Confidence in himself or his own Performances? If the highest Cedars upon the Mountains quake and bend when the Storm gathers, what shall the Shrubs and Herbs of the Valleys do, and how shall these stand against the Fury of it? Let us then conclude, with the Apostle, that, be we righteous, or be we otherwise, *Fear and Trembling* cannot but be a fit Qualification for us, in this great Work of our Salvation. For after all, the best and most effectual Caution a Christian can take to secure his great Concern, is, to distrust and think meanly of himself, and to be extremely solicitous for the Event
and

and good Acceptance of his most diligent and faithful Endeavours. The truth is, a Man then begins to be enlightned, when he is made sensible of his own Blindness; and gathers spiritual Strength, when he feels and laments his inward Weakness. But, because this humble Distrust of one's self may degenerate into Despondency, and prove a fatal Hindrance and Discouragement, if not tempered and sustained by Trust and Hope in God; therefore my next Attempt shall be to make good this Point; and to establish that Trust, by shewing, that the Work of Salvation is neither Impossible, nor exceeding Difficult, to them that place their Hope in God, and rely stedfastly upon the Truth of his Word and Promise.



C H A P. IX.

*The Encouragements to this Work, and
Easiness of succeeding in it.*

HERE I am sensible, how open I lie to be attacked with an Objection, which in the foregoing Chapters I have furnished against my self For if the Way to Salvation be really so difficult, if
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the Dangers that await Men in it be so great, the Errors and Miscarriages so many and so usual, that a Man ought to take every Step with *Fear and Trembling*, and move, as if he were to travel over Snares and Precipices, then who at last can be saved? This was the very Difficulty, which the Apostles heretofore proposed to the Son of God upon a like Occasion, when he was explaining to them the Mystery and the Conditions of everlasting Happiness. To which his Answer was, *The Things that are Impossible with Men, are Possible with God*, (Luke xviii. 27.) And by these Words he strengthens our Hope, and gives us glorious Expectations. 'Tis very certain, I allow, that if the Salvation of Man were left entirely upon his own hands, it would be an Undertaking which he by his proper Strength could never accomplish; but what exceeds his single Power, becomes not only possible, but easy, when God vouchsafes to interpose his Assistance. To this St. *Paul* attributes the Glory of his Success, *Not I*, (says he) *but the Grace of God which was with me*, (1 Cor. xv.) When therefore I advise a Distrust of our own Abilities, and such a Fear as may excite our Caution, you must understand me so, as at the same time to suppose me far from persuading to such a panick Terror, as should represent our

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whose whole Design presupposes and proceeds upon this as an acknowledged Principle. The main Argument he insists upon, why that Command should be obeyed, of *making Prayers and Supplications for all Men*, but especially for *Kings* and other Great Persons, whose Condition in the World brings their Salvation into greatest hazard, is this; That *God would have all Men to be saved*, (1 Tim. ii. 4.) The Rules of Morality laid down in the following parts of that Epistle, are built upon the same Foundation which he lays in his other Writings, and lays it so firm, as to leave no Ground of Doubt upon this Occasion. *For God* (says he) *bath not appointed us unto Wrath, but to obtain Salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*, (1 Theff. v. 8.) And indeed, after that the Son of God had taken upon him the Form of a Servant for this very Purpose, (as he argues elsewhere, *Phil. ii.*) after that eagerness and impatience which he express'd to lay down his Life, and shed his Blood for us, that so he might reconcile us to his Father, and take upon his own devoted Head the Strokes of that angry Justice, to which we were become liable; who can question the Sincerity of his Love? The Fervency of his Zeal was such, that even that Thirst, with which he seems so parched upon the Cross,

was

was but a feeble Representation of the ardent Desire he had to secure our future Happiness.

I shall not need to expatiate upon those Bowels, and that tender Mercy, that more than fatherly Compassion, (mentioned by *Zachary* in his Song of Praise, *Luke i. 78.*) which put him upon visiting us in his mysterious Incarnation. For what in truth hath not God, *rich in Mercy*, (as the Apostle styles him, *Eph. iii.*) done, to convince us of his wonderful Kindness? What Condescensions hath he thought too low to testify his Desire for our Good? That Patience and Forbearance which suffers our Imperfections; the wise Measures of his Providence, whereby he contrives that we shall not be tempted above that we are able; those Dispensations to which he submits, to spare our Infirmities; the slowness of his Justice in punishing our Offences; those preventing Graces by which he weans our Souls from Lust and Sin; those Invitations and Rewards, by which he gives Life to our Hopes, and wins us over to Goodness; the passionate Complaints he makes by his Prophets, when Men refuse to return to him; the *Parables of the Lost Sheep*, and the *Prodigal Son*, and those other Significations of his Goodness and Affection; those Rejoicings, which diffuse themselves

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through

through the whole Court of Heaven upon the Conversion of a Sinner, and the infinite other Testimonies of his Tenderness for Souls, ought to be continual and powerful Motives to a truly filial Dependence upon so good a Father; and do upbraid the inexcusable Hardness of our Hearts, if we can still be so insensible, so unworthy, as to question, whether he truly love us. For this is that Shepherd in the Gospel, who lays down his Life for the Sheep, (*John* x.) and suffers none of his Flock to wander and be lost, without being ready to leave the other ninety and nine, who stand in less need of his Presence, and run after that which is gone astray. This *lastly* is he who declares the eagerness of his Passion, by calling himself the Husband and Bridegroom of our Souls, who invites us all to the Marriage-Feast; and cannot without Indignation and sensible Concern observe the Perverseness and frivolous Pretences of those who refuse to come.

Whatever Marks of Severity he may upon occasion shew upon obstinate Offenders, yet it is plain he threatens his Judgments long before, and gives Men timely Warning, on purpose that he may not execute them. And, so marvellous is his unspeakable Goodness, that the weaker we are, the more careful and sollicitous he is for us. The
more

more of Danger there appears in the Disease, — the more manifestly is his Power exerted in the Cure of it. For, be our Sins never so great, they have still their determinate Number and Measure, but the Goodness of God knows no Bounds, no End. The depth of our Vileness and Guilt cannot exhaust the Abyss of his Mercy; and how wretched — and abandoned soever the Sinner's Condition may be, still this merciful Saviour ceases not to pity his miserable State, because he knows and kindly considers his extreme Impotence; and moved by the exceeding Greatness of his Love, *he invites us to hope in his Mercy, * even then when we provoke him to Wrath by standing out against it.* He desires our Happiness much — more than we our selves. He begs of us to have Compassion upon our-selves, and not to draw down our own certain Ruin; and yet, alas! how often does he ask in vain, and sue for that which he cannot prevail for, though our own Interest only be — concerned in the Grant of it? And shall a Saviour so dear, shall a Mediator so powerful, shall a God so inexpressibly full of Love, not find credit enough with us, to create

* Nos te provocamus ad iram; Tu nos ad Misericordiam.
L. 1. de visit. Infirm.

Deus te rogat, ut miserearis, & non vis: causam apud te agit, & non potest impetrare: *August. Serm. 102. de Temp.*

Hope and Trust in him? Shall he do so much for us, and shall we not believe, that he is in earnest, and means all this for our Good? This is most extravagant; and therefore, having seen how God stands disposed to our Salvation, I will not imagine any thing can be thought wanting on his part; let us now proceed then to see how Matters stand with our-selves.

II. Which is the Second Consideration. And what shall we say, if even our Weakness it self may be of use towards obtaining Heaven; if our very Miseries are in some Sense our Advantage? For if the Case be thus, what Obstruction to our Happiness can we reasonably complain of from our-selves? Let us have a care then of being discouraged by the Infirmities of our Flesh, and the many Frailties of this mortal State: Let not the Inconstancy of our Minds, or the Weakness of our Will terrify and perplex us. For if our Unworthiness and Corruption, great as it is, did not yet hinder the Son of God from thinking us worth redeeming at the expence of so much Suffering; we need not fear, that our Misery will be a Bar to the Accomplishment of that glorious Work upon us. If our Wickedness and wilful Ingratitude did not make him abhor us, no doubt our involuntary Ignorances and Infirmities will not do it. We shall do well there-

therefore to look upon the Mercies of God — already conferred upon us, as a sure Pledge of those which he designs us to all Eternity. If our crying Sins sound dismally in our Ears and fill us with Dread, let us recollect, that the Son of God hath died upon the Cross to deliver and cleanse us from them. If our Impotence discourage us, let us remember, that they who can do least, yet when strengthened by him, are able to do all things. It is our Weakness which ministers occasion for the Glories and Triumphs of his Grace. The Publican in the Temple, who made no difficulty to acknowledge his own Vileness, returned to his House justified in that mean Opinion of himself. For even Sin and Weakness are converted into Instruments of Strength, and are often the beginnings and earnest of Grace and great Perfection in a Christian, when he hath the ingenuity to own them, and to be humbled by the Reflection.

You see to how little purpose it is, to object your Misery and Guilt, when a sincere Confession of this is the beginning of your Desert, the first step to Virtue, and the Ground-work of all your Hope. Nor will it be to more, to pretend that your Circumstances and Business in the World incapacitate you for Salvation, when so many Instances are left upon record in Scripture,

ture, of Persons converted from the worst and most hazardous Employments. *Raah*, though a Harlot, came over from Idolatry to the true God. *Joseph* preserved his Chastity in *Egypt*. *Moses* learnt Contempt of worldly Greatness in a King's Court: A Publican became an Evangelist; a Persecutor an Apostle: In short, the frequent Conversions of notorious Sinners, are a sufficient Demonstration, that there is always at hand, a Beam of Heavenly Light to guide Wanderers into the right Way; and some Sparks of Grace to warm the most frozen Hearts. God hath his particular Seasons for Mercy, and our part must be to wait, and prepare our-selves for them. From the instant that Men distrust their own Strength, and feel their spiritual Impotence and Blindness; that they look up to Heaven and humbly implore to be directed by a Light from above; placing their Hope entirely in the Merits of their Saviour; from that instant, I say, we may date their Return to God and the right Way to Happiness. This Trust is like an inward Voice, that speaks when all the rest of their Faculties are dumb, and fails not to obtain whatever it asks. You will become strong when you fly for Succour, to him, who (according to the Prophet, *Isai. xl.*) *giveth Power to the Faint, and to them that have no Might he increaseth Strength.*

Now

Now you must understand, that this humble Confidence, which worketh Salvation, can proceed from no other Cause than a Sense of the Dangers wherewith we are encompass'd, and the absolute Necessity we lie under of imploring and receiving continually Assistance from him, who can do all things, and without whom we are our selves able to do nothing. This Disposition alone is capable of raising us out of those Depths and Distresses, into which Sin hath sunk us. In such Cases God takes delight, *where Sin hath abounded, to make his Grace much more abound*, as St. Paul expresses it, (*Rom. vi. 1.*) and thinks his Honour concerned to work more Miracles for the reducing a scandalous Offender from his lost Estate, and rescue him out of the Slavery of Sin, than he did ever to set his chosen People free from the Bondage of *Egypt*. O! the Darkness that must be scattered! O the Gulphs that must be pass'd! O! the Desarts and Rocks that must be travelled over before this stray Sheep can return and recover it self! All those Signs and Wonders wrought by *Moses* in behalf of the *Israelites*, and to perfect a temporal Deliverance, are but so many Types and Shadows of the mighty Workings of Omnipotence, for the instating Sinners in the glorious and eternal Liberty of the Sons of God. For, after all the Mis-
chief

† chief that our Errors can do us, This is
 still our Comfort, that we belong to a Flock,
 whose kind Shepherd hath done ten thou-
 sand times more to save us, than we have
 done, or could do, to destroy our selves.
 — In short, it will be very improper to object
 the Condition of our Affairs or any Incum-
 brances of Fortune in bar to our Salvation,
 when the Scripture hath so plainly directed
 us, how this Obstruction may be prevented,
 by commanding, not, that worldly Cares
 be wholly lay aside, but only that they be
 allowed their proper Place and Season; and
 promising, that upon these Terms those
 very Cares shall be blest'd and sanctified to
 us: for this is the Purport of our Lord's
 Direction, *seek ye first the Kingdom of God
 and his Righteousness; and all these
 things* (the necessary Supports of Life) *shall
 be added unto you,* (Matth. vi. 33.)

III. The third Consideration is, That
 † this Affair of Salvation considered ab-
 stractedly and in its own Nature, is not
 really hard to be compassed. *The King-
 dom of God is within you,* (says the Sa-
 viour of the World, *Luke xvii. 20.*) which
 some have understood to mean, *in your own
 power.* And again, *Ask and ye shall have,
 seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall
 be opened unto you,* (Matth. vii. 7.) That
 — is, set about the Business of your Salvation
 heartily,

heartily, and you shall not miscarry in the Undertaking. It is a *hidden* Treasure, and not to be found without diligent Search. — It is a *Pearl of great Price*, and therefore not to be had for nothing; but they who think it worth their while to buy it, shall most assuredly have it. *All things are possible to him that believeth*, says our blessed Lord, (*Mark ix. 23.*) And the Difficulty of our Salvation is generally an Effect of the Weakness of our Faith. The Ways of Virtue are troublesome and painful, but then they are so to such only, as follow their own vain Inclinations; when a Man hath once gained that Point of resisting and vanquishing his Desires, Sin from thenceforward becomes full of Uneasiness and Horror; and he can find no Charms in it. Virtue is easy and pleasant to the resolute and constant Practicers of it; the Way is rugged, only to tender Feet, and timorous Hearts. This strait Path grows broader and smoother as we advance farther in it; because by degrees we come to do those things from a Principle of Love and Choice, which were done at first out of Fear, and by Constraint. The good Way becomes a Way of Sweetness, and Joy, and Peace to a sincere Believer. His Confidence increases, and he calls up his Courage in proportion to the Difficulties that oppose his passage.

— sage. He is so thoroughly persuaded, that a Crown of everlasting Glory cannot possibly cost him too dear, that he esteems the utmost he can do and suffer in order to obtain it, as nothing in comparison. By the
 + help of this Faith it is, that, from the very first setting out, he keeps his Eye fix'd upon the Prize at the end of the Race. Then it is,
 — that Men begin to hate what they were formerly most fond of; and that God imparts himself sensibly to the Soul, by kindling there the Fire of his Love; and convincing us, that thus to hate our-selves, is most truly to love both our-selves and him.

— What is there indeed so painful and mortifying in a holy Life, which may not be softned and made highly eligible by the Prospect of that recompence, which God hath promised to every faithful Christian?
 — What Murmurings can our Impatience, even under the sharpest Sufferings, be provoked to, which may not be effectually suppress'd, when this Hope is once well settled in the Soul? After all, let us observe, what it is that God requires; and then consider well, whether there be any such mighty Difficulty in it, as Men commonly pretend. * *He commands nothing out of our power to do,*

* Non exigitur à nobis nisi quod nostrum est, & quod bonum nostrum. L. 1. de Sacr.

and he only desires, that we would consult our own true Advantage, says *Hugo de St. Victor*. If the Yoke he lays upon us were heavy, if the Law of the Gospel were arbitrary and unprofitable, our Laziness might have some plausible Pretence; but he asks no more than a Will resigned to his wiser Will, and a Heart inflamed with his Love: And can there be any Demand more reasonable? Does not he deserve all this? *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to walk in his Ways, and to love him?* (says *Moses* to the Children of *Israel*, *Deut. x. 12.*) But when this same God makes us a Proffer of his Eternal Kingdom, upon Terms so easy, as to declare it purchaseable with a Piece of Bread given to the Poor, can any Man be excused, * who refuses to make such a saving Bargain? says *Peter Chrysologus*. It is not by Miracles, or by Instances of an exalted and uncommon Virtue, or by Works of a very magnificent Charity, or by extraordinary Mortifications, or by renouncing the World and fleeing into Caves and Desarts, or by Austerities that shock the Power of Human Nature

* Deus regnum suum fragmento panis vendit, quis excusare poterit non e mentem, quem tanta vilitas venditionis accusat? *Serm. 41. de Jejun. & Eleem.*

only,

only, that we must make our Way to Heaven. St. *Matthew* hath told us, that in the last great Day, *many shall say to the Lord, Lord; have not we prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name have cast out Devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?* To whom he will make answer, that *he knows them not,* (Matth. vii. 22, 23.)

+ They are Virtues of a common size and capacity which generally carry Men to Heaven; and all the Mortification necessary to recommend and render them effectual, is only that they be animated with a lively Faith, and an humble Hope in God's
+ Mercy and Acceptance. The Man who lives like his Neighbours, and continues under the Engagements of worldly Business and Conversation, provided he live piously, and persevere in faithful Obedience to God, and be careful to discharge the Duties of that Station, in which Providence hath placed him, may say at last with *David, The Lord shall reward me after my righteous Dealing, according to the Cleanness of my Hands shall he recompence me, because I have kept the Ways of the Lord, and dealt uprightly before him,* (Psal. xviii.)
— Every humble modest Widow, that hath renounced the Vanity of the World, and devoted herself to God, may lie prostrate
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before his Altar, and cry out with *Judith*, that God heareth the Prayers of the afflicted, and is a Saviour of them that are without Strength or Hope: The afflicted Man, that will exalt his Voice, and make the Prayers he pours out in Adversity to be heard, and with *Job* quietly wait till his great Change come: It is the honest good plain Man, that exhorts and incites his Neighbours to Works of Piety and Virtue like *Tobias*: It is the Poor, like him mentioned by the wise Man, who walked in the Uprightness of his Heart, and is more to be esteemed than those Possessors of great Riches, who mount to Greatness by indirect Ways: It is the devout Christian in his Cell, who meditates in the Law of his God day and night; and, after contracting his Affairs into a narrow Compass, is, (like that Servant in the Gospel, *Matth. xxv.*) set over many things, because he had been faithful in a few things. It is the Woman of Condition, who convinces her self of the Vanity of the World, and hath discharged all Care of rendring her self agreeable to any but God only; that sets her Hope and Affections upon a future Life, and from thence hath attained to a just and generous Contempt of this; 'tis the honest pious devout Christian, in short, who contents himself with that Perfection, which is proper to his Capacity; and per-

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suaded

suaded that God is better pleased with a common Virtue in the Way of a Man's Profession, than with somewhat more extraordinary, in a Method which he never called him to: These are the Persons that go to Heaven. For in truth there is no surer Course of getting thither, than by being faithful and diligent in the Works of our respective Vocations.

We read in *Palladius*, that *Paphnutius*, after a very austere Life in the Wilderness, desired of God, that he would let him know, if there was any Man like him: Whereupon an Angel informed him, that hard by, in the City of *Heraclea*, there was a poor Piper, that got his Living by that Trade, every whit as good a Man as himself. Something like this is reported of two Hermits in the Lives of the Fathers; who, after a long time spent in the most profound Solitude, and living in the Body without the Desires of the Body; treating themselves with all the Severities of a most mortified Repentance, and utterly disengaging their Minds from every thing here below, they bethought themselves to enquire of God, whether there were any where in the World, Persons so resigned, so heavenly-minded, so every way perfect, as they. The Angel, which appeared to them, did not put them to the trouble of going far

to

to find their Match ; he told them, that upon the Confines of that very Defart, there were a Shepherd and a Shepherdess, who, by looking diligently to their Flock, living in the World, but living there with Humility, and a strict Regard to their Duty, were more acceptable to Almighty God, than they two with all their affected Solitude and supposed Perfection.

The Use I would make of this is, That every Man should apply himself with all his Might to fill the Post to which God hath appointed him ; that aspiring to Perfection in this Capacity is more agreeable to God's Will, and better approved of him, than seeking to advance to higher degrees of Goodness, in Methods of our own affecting, such as are singular and out of the common road of living ; and that, Innocency of Life, and Sincerity of Heart, are really the most valuable of all Perfections. For God, who is a simple Being, delights in Souls that resemble him in Simplicity ; and, provided that good Disposition be not wanting, he will be sure to reward their least pompous Virtues with an incorruptible Crown. He measures not Mens Deserts by outward Shew and Circumstances, but hath promised Paradise to a Cup of cold Water, when given for his sake. This gave occasion to that Remark of St. Paul,

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that,

that when he consider'd the slight Troubles of the present Life, and the Recompence designed for them hereafter, he could not find any sort of proportion between *these lighter Afflictions which are but for a moment*, and that eternal and far more exceeding weight of Glory, which they work out for us. (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Ah! says * St. Bernard, if our least Actions, short and transient as they seem, be yet capable of becoming the Seeds of a blessed Eternity; if one Moment can entitle us to a Reward, that shall abide for ever, what Stupidity is it to lose, I do not say so long a time, but such an Eternity of Happiness and Glory, which we have it in our power to qualify our selves for?

But if this Glory do not yet affect us so sensibly as it ought, yet at least let the Easiness of securing it to our selves encourage our Diligence. Our Minds might be capable of very great Things, if we would but accustom them to despise little ones. And we should find no difficulty in relishing Heavenly Joys, if we did once refine our Taste by weaning our Affections from those upon Earth. Happy are they indeed, to

* Non transeunt opera nostra ut videntur, sed temporalia quæque veluti æternitatis semina jaciuntur. Bern. Serm. 25. ad Cler.

whom it is given, to know the Myſteries of the Kingdom of God. And, in good truth, this World, which is no better than Corruption, this Earth, ſo full of Miſeries, this Life, which is one continued Scene of Sufferings and Sorrows, is infinitely miſtaken, when we ſuppoſe it eligible, above that Bleſs which the Power and Goodneſs of God hath prepared for his faithful choſen Servants. Have ſo many Martyrs gladly purchaſed this at the Expence of their Blood? Have ſo many zealous Souls ſo reſolutely renounced even their lawful Pleaſures and Enjoyments? Have ſo many Believers forſaken all, and followed Chriſt, that they might have Treaſure in Heaven, and ſhall we think much to ſerve him in our reſpective Stations? Shall we grudge the very Superfluities of Life, and not give — that which would only feed our Luxury, to the Saviour of the World, when he calls upon us to relieve his hungry and diſtreſs'd Members? For though we be Sinners, yet the Prophet hath aſſured us, (*Iſai. lviii.*) *that if we deal our Bread to the Hungry, and cover the Naked with a Garment, our Light ſhall break forth as the Morning, and our Health ſhall ſpring up ſpeedily; and our Righteouſneſs ſhall go before us, and the Glory of the Lord ſhall be our Rear-ward.*

For now is the Time of Clemency and Mercy, and therefore it will behove us to husband these precious Moments, with a true Christian Prudence, while the Day of Grace and good Acceptance, during this short Life, continues. Jesus Christ, at his first appearance, came not to condemn the World, but to save the World, (*John* iii. 17.) Let us prevent the Terroures of his second Coming, while we may, and provide for that Day of Wrath, in which he shall appear again in the Brightness of his Majesty, and exalt the Standard of his Cross, with a Lustre excelling that of the Sun in the Firmament. Then shall that glorious Cross, which is become the Instrument of Salvation to Mankind, declare to all the World the unspeakable Love of him, who suffered himself to be fastned to it for the sake of wretched Mortals, and convince us, that he hath left nothing on his part undone, that might contribute to our Happiness. The Scandal of this Cross shall then be done away, and all that Wisdom and Power of God appear, which was exerted in the mysterious Work of our Redemption. Let us then follow the Apostle's Advice, and with *an humble Confidence approach the Throne of Grace*, (*Heb.* iv.) *that we may find Mercy in time of need*, and all those Helps necessary for a Holy Life.

Life. A Life, whose great Difficulties are now removed, since the Son of God hath disarmed the Powers of Hell and the World, by his meek Life, and ignominious Death. If these Considerations are not sufficient to encourage us in the Way to Salvation, which is so smoothed by the Assistances we receive from above, and hath no Hardships left, but such as are owing to our own Weakness and Irresolution; if this Undertaking, softened by our Lord, and easy in its own Nature, do not encourage us, I am sure it ought to fill our Souls with Terror and Amazement. For what Punishment, what Vengeance can be too severe, for those Wretches who neglect so glorious a Reward; and that such a Reward as they may with so much ease attain to? What Torments are too exquisite, what Flames too hot, for those obstinate abandoned Sinners, who, when God hath put Salvation in their own choice, and afforded them such powerful Encouragements and Advantages, do yet chuse Misery, and will not be persuaded not to ruin themselves?





C H A P. X.

*That in order to our own Salvation,
we ought to contribute to the Salvation
of others.*

NOW, if we are, as I hope by this time we are, abundantly persuaded of how great Importance, this Affair of Salvation is, and the dreadful Consequence of our Negligence in it ; let us lose no time, but from this Instant enter upon such a Course of Life, as may, by making the best of that small Remainder of Days we have to spend here, effectually prevent our dying eternally hereafter. Let us labour to secure this everlasting Rest to our selves, which our Religion hath indented for, and deliver our Souls from those vain Disquiets and anxious Cares, which a Life of little or no continuance would involve us in. But let us observe, first of all, that it is not sufficient for Men to confine all their Endeavours after Happiness to themselves, for they are obliged to contribute to the saving others too. The true Christian cannot think of being blessed alone, but teaches others,

others, which way they may be so too. He is much of the Disposition, that *Eucherius* professes in his Epistle to *Valerian*; * *I cannot* (says he) *think of my own Salvation, without being at the same time solicitous for yours; for I look upon you as my other self, and love you accordingly.* And indeed when a Man hath true Faith, he labours to unite himself to his Fellow-Christians, that, like so many living Stones, mutually supporting each other, and built upon Jesus Christ the Corner-stone, they may form a holy Temple to the Honour of their God and Saviour. For we are obliged by that Zeal for God's Glory, which ought to be a great and governing Principle with us, to labour as much as possibly we can, that the Number of Partakers in our Glory may be increased; and to engage our Brethren to bear a part in that holy Consort of Angels and Saints, where the Praises of their Redeemer are continually sung, and God is blessed for evermore. And these Endeavours we are bound to use on their behalf, not only because we all travel the same Way, and design for the same Place, and are of the same Flock, and all acknowledge the

* Cum te æque ac me diligam, necesse est ut summum bonum assequi te, tanquam me alterum, cupiam. *Epist. ad Valer.*

same common Shepherd, but for our own sakes too; because by assisting in the Salvation of those with whom we converse, we shall best promote and secure our own. For nothing, to be sure, can more effectually recommend us to the good Graces and favourable Acceptance of our Saviour, than the imitating his great Work, and becoming Saviours to others, so far as we are capable of it, by imparting to them holy Advice and wholesome Instructions, and edifying them by good Examples.

Of this admirable Charity to Mens Souls it is, that St. *Paul* is to be understood, when he tells the *Corinthians*, (1 Ep. xii. 31.) that he would *shew unto them a more excellent Way*, better than the most astonishing Powers and best Gifts of the Spirit, for the rendring them perfect, and bringing them to Heaven. And if Love and Charity be this Way, can that be better express'd, than by enlightning their Minds with that Divine Grace from Heaven, the least Ray whereof scatters and eclipses all earthly Objects? than by disabusing them, and drawing off their Affections from visible Things, that they may be fixed upon such as are Invisible and Eternal? than by convincing Men how infinitely vain, how mere a nothing those pretended Advantages are, which mistaken Wretches hold in highest Estimation;

mation; and raising their Souls to that truly generous Courage and Greatness of Soul, which Christianity commends and teaches, which consists in despising all that appears terrible to Sense, and making him the only Object of our Fear, who, when he hath killed, can cast into Hell, and punish with an everlasting Destruction? In a word, to set before them all those Arguments, which may open their Eyes, and teach them the Life of good Christians here, and that of blissful Saints hereafter? This is the only real Good a Soul is capable of receiving from us, and the most beneficial Proof of Affection and sincere Kindness, that one Christian can possibly give to another.

With this Love the Son of God was enflamed, when he condescended to die upon the Cross, for the Redemption of Mankind; with this the Hearts of his Apostles burn'd, when they travelled throughout the World, to teach all Nations this Myſtery, and preach the Kingdom of God; and by the mighty Power of this Love, they were inspired with Resolution to drink their Master's Cup, and lay down their Lives too for the Brethren. For when a Man hath once true Faith, this will convince him of what infinite Importance and Benefit the Saving of Souls is; and that Persuasion cannot but kindle a holy Zeal, to attempt the procuring the
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same infinite Good to our Neighbour, which we own of such inestimable Value, and absolute Necessity to our selves. Were Men but duly affected with this Sense, it is not to be conceived, that our Societies trading to the *Indies* should be so extremely greedy, and take such pains, for the Riches of those Countries, and yet so much suffer the Merchant to swallow up the Christian, as to take no Care of planting the Gospel amongst them. Happy no doubt are they, who out of a sincere Love to Truth, and Charity to them who remain ignorant of it, set their Hands to this good Work. For how can Men, who profess themselves Disciples of *Jesus Christ*, see these poor Wretches, who are a part of his Kingdom, and not pity their Errors, nor lend them their Assistance, and lead them to the Truth, since God hath expressly by the Prophet, (*Psal.* 11.) given to his Son the *Heathen for his Inheritance* and the utmost Parts of the Earth for his Possession, and since that Son hath likewise acquired a full Title to them, by the Purchase and Conquest of his triumphant Death? This, if I may be allowed so bold an Expression, would be in some sense to save our Saviour himself; when we thus gather up and bring in the Price of his Blood, scattered and lost in the dark and distant Corners of the Earth. And this we do,

do, when we make the Light of Truth to shine, among those miserable Creatures, to whom the Revelation of the Gospel is not imparted, as (blessed be God) it is to us.

If then Men have a true Zeal for the Glory of Jesus, and the Interest of his Blood, they should express it by their Diligence to bring his lost Sheep into the Fold; and such as have the Light of the Gospel lifted up upon them, cannot more worthily testify their Gratitude for so great a Blessing, than by improving every fair Occasion of Delivering those from their Misery, whom the thick Night of Ignorance hath overspread. For every good Servant will naturally endeavour to spread the Knowledge, and advance the Honour of his Master as far as he can.

But alas! we need not cross the Seas, and travel to the remotest Parts of the World for opportunities to exercise this Zeal. The Infidelity and Wickedness of the Age we live in, hath cut us out Work more than enough nearer home. And therefore we shall do well to begin with Instructing and Converting those with whom we daily converse. Let us then secure our own eternal Advantage, by labouring earnestly for theirs; and take care, that the Light of Grace shed abroad in our Hearts, may reflect at least back upon those who dwell within the reach

— reach of its Activity. Let us try to bring into the Way of Truth our Friends and Neighbours that have erred and are deceived, and rescue them from those ravening Wolves in Sheeps Clothing, those false Prophets, whose Gain is their Godliness. Let us consider all Christians with regard to their common Saviour, and lay aside all those partial Distinctions, which different Circumstances in the World, and other carnal Considerations, are used to make. When we make our Saviour and his Doctrine truly understood, we add to his Glory; when we convert Sinners from the Error of their Ways, and bring over more Subjects to the obedience of Christ, we enlarge the Borders of his Kingdom. What indeed can we do more acceptable to God, than to contribute towards the saving of Souls, since this is, as I said, in some sense ourselves to become the Saviours of our Saviour himself? For, if when *we visit them that are in Prison*, if when *we feed the Hungry*, and *clothe the Naked*, Jesus Christ interprets the Kindnesses done to *the least of his Brethren*, as *done to his own Person*, (*Matth. xxv.*) how can we imagine but he will pass the same favourable Construction upon the Services we do to the Souls of sinful and mistaken Men?

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We observe Men generally very tenderly affected with the Death of the Body, when this happens to some poor Wretch destitute of Friends and Succour ; or to a Malefactor, upon whom the Law executes just Punishment : But very few are concerned for the Loss and eternal Ruin of infinite Souls, who live in Dissoluteness and Debauchery, and are undone by a wicked Compliance with the Corruptions of a degenerate World. We should make it a Point of Duty and Conscience, to relieve the Afflicted and Oppressed, or to guide a blind Man into the right way ; and shall we be so Cruel, so Insensible, as to suffer the Persons we converse with to live and die in dangerous Errors ? Shall we be deaf to that Advice of the Apostle, which calls upon us to lend a helping hand to these Wretches, and pluck them out of that everlasting Fire, which is prepared for a Punishment of their Crimes ? (*Jude* 23.)

Let us reflect upon that Prince of Darkness, how extreme vigilant and industrious this common Enemy of God and Man is ; how much more pains he takes to destroy Mens Souls, than we do to save them, (*1 Pet.* v. 8.) No Condition of Life is so despicable, no Fortune so mean, no Soul so vile, that he does not think it worth his while to destroy it. All Circumstances are
1 equal,

equal, all Places indifferent to him, provided he can but compass his wicked and malicious Purposes. The very Extremity of those Torments, which increase in proportion as his pernicious Designs succeed, do not abate one whit of that Eagerness he hath to do mischief. And what do we, who believe the Gospel, we, whose Character and justest Commendation consists in the Love of our Brethren, and an indefatigable Zeal for their Good and God's Honour; what, I say, do we do like this, in our Endeavours to promote Mens Happiness? How far are we from concerning ourselves with their Behaviour? What Assistances do we extend to them by our Prayers or good Counsel? With what Indifference do we behold the fatal Errors and most profligate Manners of our nearest Relations and most intimate Friends? How can this Coldness agree with our Profession, and with what Face can we pretend to be Christians, while our Faith is so very feeble and unactive?

If St. *Paul* declares that *Man worse than an Infidel, who provides not for them of his own House*, (1 Tim. v. 8.) what Judgment must we make of such as use their Relations, only for Instruments of gratifying their Passions, Tools to their Vices, and make them their Companions, and Coadjutors

adjutors in Wickedness? What can we think — of those who corrupt their Brethren by ill Examples? How great must be their Condemnation, who destroy their Souls, which Providence hath committed to their Charge and Direction, on purpose that they might lead them into the Ways of Holiness and eternal Glory? They are appointed by God to feed their Children with the Bread of Life, and, instead of this, they poison them with corrupt Principles. And what will become of that Flock whose very Shepherd goes astray? How severe a Punishment must needs await those Guides, who ought to be the *Salt and Light of the World*; and yet instead of enlightning the Blind, add to their Darkness; instead of preserving those under their Care from Corruption, are the first and chief Instruments of corrupting them? These are *those wandering Stars* mentioned by St. Jude, (Verse 13.) which propagate Darkness instead of Light: These the Clouds, which rain down Storms and Fire; where they ought to shed refreshing Showers and gentle Dew. Against these false and blind Guides it is, that the Prophet *Ezekiel* discharges the Heat of his Zeal, when he speaks to them in the Name of the Lord after this manner, (Ch. xxxiv.) *Ye eat the Fat, and clothe you with the Wool, ye kill them that are fed, but*

ye feed not the Flock. The Diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost. Therefore behold I am against the Shepherds, and I will require my Flock at their hand, saith the Lord God. I omit the other Threatnings of the Prophet against the negligent Shepherds, which are also very terrible. For nothing is more provoking to Almighty God, than the Indifference of those Persons, whose Station requires a more than ordinary Zeal. And the Inference from hence is very natural and just, that, since labouring to promote the Salvation of others is so very acceptable to God, and so beneficial to our selves, the being unconcern'd for other Mens Happiness must needs be a dangerous Obstruction to our own.

But however since the most effectual Method of advancing the Glory of God is to assist others in the Works of Virtue and Salvation, this is the least we can possibly do, to take good heed, that if we do them no good by our Advice, we may be sure to do them no hurt by our Example.

But, since the Exorbitance of the present Age is so excessive, that no former Times perhaps

perhaps can furnish us with a Parallel; since even Probity and common Honesty are almost utterly lost and extinct among Men; since Profaneness and Irreligion is become so general, that the Scandal of it is come up to the very Altar; let us arm ourselves with all the Power of that godly Zeal, which Christian Charity inspires, to reduce our Brethren that indulge themselves in wicked Courses. Let us with a Holy Confidence set our selves against that Impiety, which is getting ground so fast in their Hearts. Let us harden our Faces, and stand in the gap against that impetuous Torrent of Custom, which bears down so many weak unwary Souls. Let us oppose the vicious Examples of the Rich and Great, by which the Men of inferiour Condition are perverted, and Sin is not only countenanced but authorized. Let us teach Believers to withstand the overflowing Debauchery of Manners and Principles, by calling up those Remains of Faith, now so hard to be met with in the World. Let us pray for the better Understanding of them, who are overborn with carnal Considerations, and by a vicious and mistaken Modesty shamed out of Virtue, at a time when Vice is grown into Reputation. Let the Preachers of the Gospel brandish the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and make

it glitter in the Eyes of Sinners more fiercely than ever. Let them arm their People with all the Terrors of Religion, and every thing that can awaken Men out of their spiritual Slumber; let them display the Judgments of God in their most affrighting Form, that the most hardned may hear, and fear and tremble. But let them be careful too to do this so dexterously, that an indiscreet Rigour may not discourage the Feeble. When Men speak in Publick, Severity will become them, because the general Rules of Living must make Perfection their Aim; but when they confer in Private, some Condescensions are necessary, because then there is a Regard due to the Infirmities of particular Persons. We cannot be too zealous against Sin; but then that Zeal must be tempered with Patience, and the Apostle directs that Sinners should be *instructed in Meekness*, (2 Tim. ii. 25.) Let them consider they have Men to deal with, and treat them with Humanity. Let the Sense and Experience of our own Infirmities move Compassion towards those of other People. And especially let us beware, lest by too rugged a Behaviour, and too fierce and frightful Representations of Virtue, we dismay those that are well disposed to it. Let us, in a word, observe the mighty Condescensions of our blessed Saviour,

viour, and how he accommodated himself and his Discourses, to the several Circumstances of the Persons, whom he laboured to win over to the Truth.

Particularly let us reflect upon that Method of his, (*John xvii. 19.*) *For their sakes I sanctify my self, that they also might be sanctified in the Truth.* He taught them Perfection by his own Example. And herein we must imitate him, by going before Men in that Way to Salvation, which we would persuade them to. The most likely Course of prevailing with our Neighbours to do well, is to let them see those shining Virtues in our own Conversations, which we endeavour to recommend; to convince, and to instruct them by, that most effectual of all Arguments, our Actions. We must become perfect, if we hope to make others so. This is more especially the Duty of them who have the Care of Souls; and the Office of a Guide is not duly, is not regularly, discharged, except he be a Pattern as well as a Director. Let our Behaviour then confirm our Discourses; and our Practice illustrate and declare the Truth of our Principles. We must begin with plucking the Beam out of our own Eyes, and convert our selves in order to the Conversion of our Brethren. Good Men alone are duly qualified to promote Good-

ness effectually in others. The Blemishes of spiritual Guides are a most unhappy Obstacle to their Labours, and of pernicious Consequence to the Souls intrusted with them. And that Blessing from above, from which alone those Labours can derive Success, is usually obtained by an inviolable Fidelity, and diligent Improvement of Grace in our own Conduct. We shall then be proper and perfect Instruments of God's Glory in the Zeal we employ for the Souls of our Fellow-Christians, when the same Impressions appear lively and strong upon our selves, which we endeavour to make upon them. Let us then be first disabused, and get above the Vanities of this World, that we may rescue others from Delusion; and *let our Light shine before Men, clear and bright, that seeing our good Works they may glorify our Father which is in Heaven*, by endeavouring to be like us *in all manner of holy Conversation and Godliness*. For this is the Way to save both our selves, and those that hear us.





C H A P. XI.

The Conclusion of this whole Treatise.

IF after all that hath been said, we are not yet sufficiently made sensible, of the infinite Importance and Necessity, of labouring with our utmost Might to obtain eternal Salvation, what can persuade, what can convince us? Shall this active * Soul of ours be content to continue ignorant in a Matter, where our great, our only true Interest is concerned; and blind to its own state, when it cannot endure to be so to any thing else? What can we imagine will become of us at last, if we be not rightly informed, either of the Way by which, or the Place whither, we ought to go? Or who will shew us any real good, if the Light of God's Countenance, and the Impressions of his Grace have not been able to discover it to us? Are our Capacities so feeble, or our Thoughts so loose and inconsistent, that they cannot embrace a Truth, which must be comprehended, only by long

* Sic animus humanus cæcus latere vult, se autem ut lateat aliquid non vult. *Aug. Conf. l. 10. c. 23.*

and continued Reflections? Or is not rather our inordinate fondness for temporal Happiness the true account, why we have so little Affection and Esteem for that eternal one, which is infinitely better?

There want not Arguments, 'tis plain, to shew the Folly of thus misplacing our Love; but, if neither the inconstancy of the things themselves, nor the uncertainty of Life, that strongest tenure by which we can hold them; if that fleeting Scene of worldly Greatness, the false Glitter of the Vanities we doat on, the Emptiness and Deceit of all here below, if this Cheat, this almost universal Imposture of Flesh and Blood, are Reasons too weak to disengage our Hearts from Earth and its Follies; yet at least let the Pretensions we have to Heaven, the Adoption of the Sons of God, the prospect of an everlasting Kingdom in Reversion; the Reconciliation made between the Creator and his Creatures; the Participation of the Merits of Jesus Christ; the inestimable Worth of his Blood shed for us; the glorious Promises of the Gospel; and that incomprehensible Bliss prepared for the Elect, be Motives powerful enough for raising our Souls to Heaven, and enflaming them with ardent and sincere Desires of Salvation. And what indeed can make impression upon us, if such forcible Considerations as these are
not

not able to do it? How long shall we doat upon the Darkness and thick Shades of this gloomy Life; and by a wretched Stupidity prefer the ignominious Slavery of *Egypt* before the glorious Liberty of the Children of Light? If we be not convinced of the Necessity of this great Concern, let us beg of God to give us Eyes of Faith, that we may see and understand. But if we believe, that we ought to secure this Point, why do we not apply our selves to the Work and live in conformity to our Belief? The Gospel hath told us, (*Matt. vii. 26.*) that every one *who heareth the Truth and doth it not, is like unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Let us therefore be very serious in this matter; and, since we are called to a glorious Eternity, let us treat all perishing and temporary Objects, with the Contempt they deserve. For what a Reproach is it, that Souls, so exalted, as ours are or ought to be with the Hopes of Heaven, should still be groveling in the Dust, and creep like the vilest Insects upon Earth and sensual Delights?

Let us reflect how vain all that Glory is, which here we so eagerly pursue; how short that Moment, which we sottishly prefer before

fore Eternity. And, since the only solid and substantial Thing in this Life is the care of another, and the securing our future Happiness; let us learn, that the highest pitch of humane Wisdom, and the very Perfection of Christian Perfection, is to renounce and despise the present, in expectation of that which is to come: But which, when once come, shall never have an end. In short, that the best, the only good thing we can do, is to lead a pure and pious Life, and to finish it with a holy Death.

If our Hearts be still weak and liable to be perverted by the use of worldly Conveniences, and the great variety of Accidents to which we stand daily exposed; let us *strengthen our selves in the Profession of our Faith*, remembering that *He is faithful, who hath promised*, as St. Paul exhorts, (Heb. x. 23.) Let us wait with humble Submission, and respectful Silence, for the Conclusion of this Exile and Misery, to which Sin hath condemned us for a Season; being *followers of those great good Men, who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promises*; as the same Apostle advises, (Heb. vi. 12.) Let us tread in the Steps of that holy Patriarch, mentioned in that Epistle, (chap. xi.) whose Excellence and Commendation it was, that he constantly bore Heaven in his Eye, as the true Country of Promise,

Promise, of which *Canaan* in the Old Testament was but a very feeble Representation. For this Prospect, and this Hope, is of it self capable of being a sufficient Defence and Encouragement against any Afflictions of the present Life. Let us bewail the length of this tedious Pilgrimage, and think it an unhappiness, that we are still condemned to Exile, and long for our Reception to our own Country. Let us behave our selves like Travellers (for such in effect we are here below) who support the badness of the Ways, and the inclemency of the Weather, and all the other inconveniences they meet with upon their Journey, content with the hopes of Rest and Ease when they reach home; and let us, even from our Sufferings, take Courage and Comfort, because Afflictions are the ready way to Heaven. If Adversity discompose us, let us draw off our Affections from perishing and transitory Objects, and place them upon such as are fix'd and eternal. Let us not perplex our thoughts with the mysterious Methods of Providence, by which God chuses to bring good Men to himself through rugged and difficult Ways; for if Misfortunes, like a strong Gale, drive them so much sooner into Port, where is the just Cause of Complaint? Nor let those Pleasures, which the Prosperous find here below, amuse us; but rather let us imitate the

the ancient *Jews*, who could find no Pleasures by the Waters of *Babylon* so entertaining, but that they bewailed their Captivity notwithstanding, and earnestly wished for a return into their own Country. Let us, like them, sigh and pant after the true *Canaan*, and run with fresh redoubled eagerness to the end of our Race, without suffering any thing we meet with in our Passage to divert us from the right Course. Let us quicken our Pace, and add to our diligence for the time to come, in proportion to our past Errors and Neglects, and make amends for the precious opportunities we have lost, as the terrible Day of the Lord approaches nearer to us. *Let us cast away*, (as *St. Paul* advises, *Rom. xiii. 13.*) *the Works of Darkness*, and let us put on the *Armour of Light*, and let us walk while we have day, for fear the Night surprize, and take us unprovided. Let us be ready for *the Bridegroom's Call*, that we may enter in with him to the *Marriage* without delay; and let our Hearts and Hopes be fixed upon that holy Place, where alone true Joys are to be found. Let us prefer the Honours of Heaven, for which God and Nature designed us, before all the false Lustre of this World; that we may recover those true Notions of greatness, which our first Father enjoyed in the State of his Innocence. Let us consider what a bright
glorious

glorious Day will succeed that gloomy Night in which we live at present, and passionately wish for that happy hour, when this never declining day shall break upon us. Let this noble Hope add to the Warmth and Vigour of our Faith, and let us, by being rich in good Works, lay up those Treasures in Heaven, which we shall find stick by us for ever, when Death shall snatch all our other Possessions away; and let us be content with the same assurance of Salvation, which other holy Men have enjoyed before us. An Assurance laid deep and strong, built upon the Foundation of Modesty and holy Fear, a total Distrust of our own Merits, and an humble Confidence in the Mercies of our good God.

For thou, *O God*, alone art our Hope: —
Thou only canst, and thou wilt, heal all —
our Infirmities, bind up our Wounds, repair —
our Breaches, settle our wandering Souls, —
and strengthen our feeble Wishes and Endeavours. —
O save us then from that threatening Tempest, which this boisterous and troublesome Life exposes us to; let that Almighty Voice, which said to the Winds and Seas, *Be still*, and *immediately there was a great Calm*; let that same Voice command our Passions down, and perfectly compose the Tossings and Storms of our Souls. Let —
that invincible Arm, which brings Light out

out of Darkness, assist us in our Conflict, and help us to overcome that Charm, with which the Splendor of this World bewitches wretched Mortals. Scatter these Clouds, which intercept our sight, and hinder us from discerning our true Interest; speak in our Ears those Words of Life, which instruct ignorant Minds, and make them duly sensible, both of their present Misery, and that inestimable Bliss, promised and prepared for them that love and fear thee. Break the Bands that fasten us down to Earth and sensible Objects; exalt and refine our Desires from their dross; take away from us the Spirit of this World, and fill us with thy own. 'Tis true indeed, we have deserved nothing but Anger and Vengeance at the hands of our God, because we have taken great and wicked Pains to defeat the good Intentions and Effects of all his former Mercies vouchsafed unto us. But do thou, *Blessed Lord*, convince us experimentally, that thou art much more powerful to save than we ourselves can be to destroy: that thy Clemency can triumph over our Obstinacy, that thy Goodness can overcome thy Justice; and that the Salvation which is by no means due to any Actions of ours, is yet the deserved Reward of thy meritorious Sufferings. Shed forth the Beams of that heavenly Wisdom into our Hearts, which

*Mercy can
balance thy
Justice.*

which prepares Believers for the effectual Influences of thy Grace, and teaches them how to value the Treasures of a Future and Spiritual Bliss: Shew us the infinite difference between an immortal Crown, and the imperfect Satisfaction of a Moment; and enable us to despise all that is present and visible, in comparison of that which is invisible and eternal.

And although we be miserably great Sinners, yet let us not despair of Grace on the one hand; or on the other be so insensible of our Wretchedness, that we should ever cease to cry unto thee with the most affectionate Sighs and Groans of sorrowful and wounded Hearts, in the Style of thy ancient Prophets; *Save, Lord, and hear us; O Lord, shew thy Mercy upon us, and grant us thy Salvation.*

But after all, there is no other Way of — coming to the Father, but by the Son. For he is the Mediator between God and Man; he only, (as the Prophet expresses it) is *the Hope of all the Ends of the Earth, and of them that remain in the broad Sea,* (Psal. lxxv.) And, though we + should be so zealous and so successful in our Endeavours, as to bring over all the World to the Ways of Truth and Righteousness; yet even thus our Merits would not be a — sufficient Foundation of Confidence, but
our

— our only Trust and Refuge must be still in his great Mercies. *For there is no other Name under Heaven given unto Men whereby they can be saved, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ,* (Acts iv. 12.) He only can have a Property in our Salvation, because that Salvation is entirely the Effect and Fruit of his Sufferings. Perfect then, O dear Redeemer, the Design thou hast so graciously begun: Come thy own self, and in much Compassion bring back this stray Sheep to thy own Fold; — destroy and root up in us our own Work, — for that is the Work of Sin; but preserve and finish thine, for that is Goodness and Grace. And although we may have been so unhappy, as to forget that we were thy Creatures, yet be not thou provoked to lay aside thy Bowels, or ever to forget that thou art our God and only Saviour.

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